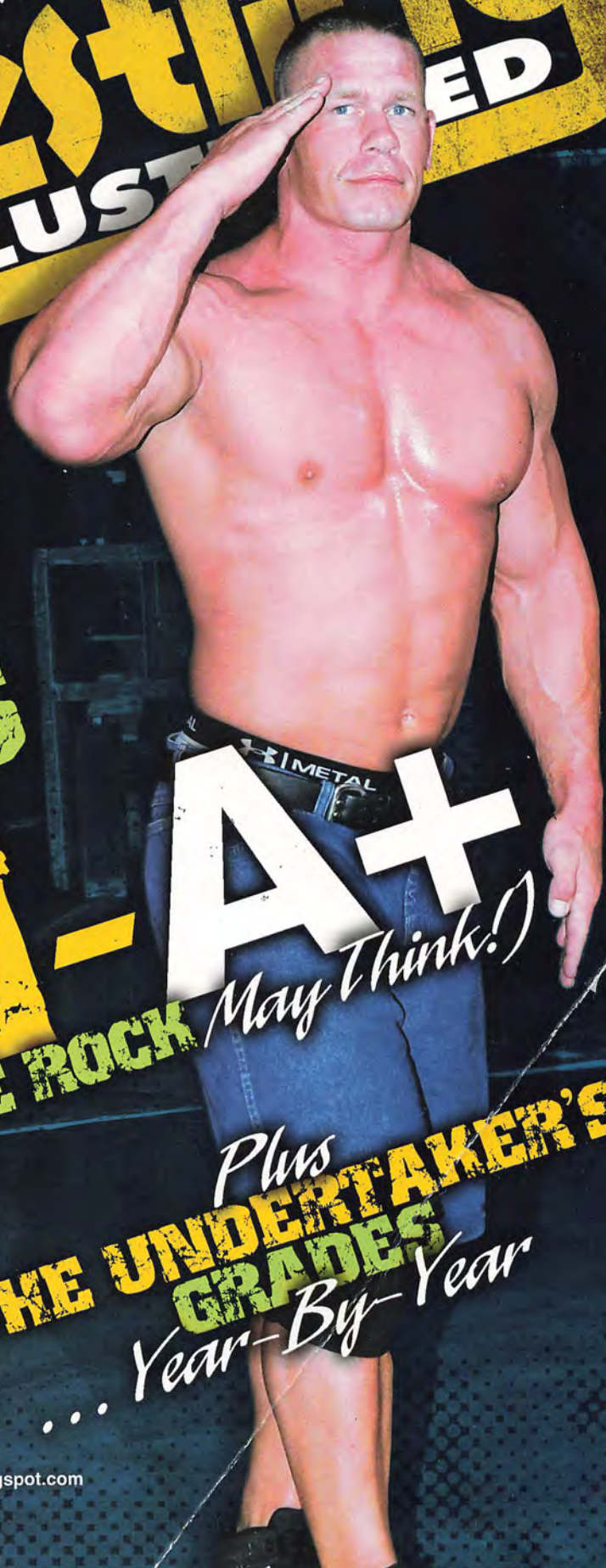
ANOTHER FINE KAPPA PUBLICATION

164-PAGE Collector's Edition

PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED



REPORT CARDS of the STARS

GEN-A+

(In Spite Of What THE ROCK May Think!)

Plus

THE UNDERTAKER'S GRADES

... Year-By-Year

JULY 2011

$9.95

07

0 72246 00388 6

Display Until June 16

pwi-online.com

prowrestlingillustrated.blogspot.com

Find us on Facebook

WIN A REAL BELT!

Dream up your very own professional wrestler and manage his career. Compete for the World Title every three weeks and win a championship belt, engraved plaque, or other prizes!

Don't get scammed by imitators that will take your money and run — the IWA created play-by-mail wrestling in 1985 and has been going strong ever since. Our prizes are better, our service is better, and our prices are even **lower** than when we started!

No one has the competition we do. Choose from over 8,000 opponents in more than 60 leagues, managed by people from all over the world. Those managers have included movie stars and professional wrestlers, like everyone's favorite superhero, **Shane "Hurricane" Helms!**

Use this coupon to create your imaginary wrestler. Send it with $3 for your first ten matches to:

IWA CHALLENGE
BOX 5275
WILLOWICK, OH 44095

Copyright © 2004 Worlds Unlimited, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

WEAR-DOWN HOLDS

1. Airplane spin
2. Arm drag
3. Arm lock
4. Asian spike
5. Atomic drop
6. Bear hug
7. Bite
8. Body slam
9. Body tackle
10. Bulldog
11. Chicken wing
12. Choke slam
13. Claw
14. Clothesline
15. Cross body block
16. Double axehandle
17. Drop kick
18. Eagle split
19. Elbow smash
20. Eye gouge
21. Face rake
22. Fireman's carry ram
23. Flying body press
24. Flying clothesline
25. Flying drop kick
26. Flying elbow drop
27. Flying head butt
28. Flying mare
29. Forearm smash
30. Foreign object
31. Full nelson
32. Giant swing
33. Grapevine
34. Hair pull
35. Hammer lock
36. Head lock
37. Head stomp
38. Hip roll
39. Irish whip
40. Knee drop
41. Leg lock
42. Leg sweep
43. Manager interference
44. Monkey flip
45. Overhead toss
46. Pole ram
47. Reverse chin lock
48. Rolling scissors
49. Rope burn
50. Russian sickle
51. Savate kick
52. Scissors grip
53. Shoulder breaker
54. Slingshot
55. Snap mare
56. Step-over toe hold
57. Suplex
58. Surfboard
59. Turnbuckle smash
60. Wrist lock

SET-UP HOLDS

61. Abdominal stretch
62. Avalanche
63. Backbreaker
64. Backroll press
65. Belly to belly
66. Big splash
67. Boston crab
68. Brain buster
69. Camel clutch
70. Cobra clutch
71. Cradle
72. Crucifix
73. DDT
74. Figure four
75. Flying leg drop
76. Gourd buster
77. Hurricanrana
78. Moonsault
79. Neckbreaker
80. Piledriver
81. Power bomb
82. Power slam
83. Scorpion deathlock
84. Sleeper
85. Slingshot suplex
86. Spine buster
87. Stunner
88. Sunset flip
89. Superplex
90. Texas cloverleaf

YOUR NAME (PRINT NEATLY)

STREET ADDRESS

CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE

WRESTLER'S NAME (DO NOT USE ANY REAL PRO WRESTLER NAMES)

WEAR-DOWN HOLDS: *Choose 10 of the holds at the left numbered 1-60. Only use a hold once.*

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10 _____

SET-UP HOLDS: *Choose 5 of the holds at the left numbered 61-90. Only use a hold once.*

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

FINISHING HOLD: *Create your own custom final maneuver or choose a hold from our list.*

EDITOR'S NOTE

IF YOU'RE ANYTHING like me, your first instinct is to open this magazine and immediately flip to your favorite wrestlers to see how well or poorly they fared in this year's Report Cards issue.

But, please, go first to page 7 and carefully read the "Introduction" before diving into our grades.

The introduction to this issue is only 500 words long, but they are the most important words in the magazine. That's because they explain the rationale behind our grading criteria. They are, essentially, the key to understanding—and hopefully enjoying—this issue.

That's not to say you must read the introduction to enjoy our colorful action shots, striking pinups, or year-by-year career retrospective of The Undertaker. But to fully appreciate what's written on each wrestler's report card, it helps to understand where our editors are coming from.

Of course, no matter how much explanation we provide, our Report Cards issue will always produce a head-scratcher or two. The one report card that had me climbing the walls this year belongs to AJ Styles.

I am as big a fan of AJ as anybody, and I know in my heart that Styles is not a B- wrestler. But as editor-in-chief, I had to put my fandom aside and take an objective look at his performance over the previous 12 months. And Styles had one sub-standard year. The 2010 "*PWI* 500" number-one was phased out of meaningful matches on *Impact* and on pay-per-views. And, even more perplexing, he spent a good part of the year dropping house show matches to Jeff Jarrett and other men he should have beaten.

Whether or not TNA or Styles deserves the blame for his bad year (80/20 TNA, if you ask me) is irrelevant. The bottom line is Styles simply did not have an A+ (or even a B+) year, and we had to grade him accordingly.

Conversely, I know it pained some of our editors to give the arrogant Alberto Del Rio an A, and the overbearing Miz a B+. But to try to deny their success over the past year would have been folly. It also would have been dishonest. Therefore, these men received the grades they both earned and deserved.

Then there's the case of Randy Orton, who became arguably the most popular wrestler in the world over the past year. If report cards were popularity contests, Orton would have been valedictorian of his class, and received an A++ in Overall Value. Unfortunately, though, Orton dropped the WWE title to The Miz after an unremarkable reign, and spent the rest of his year battling The Nexus, getting no closer to the strap. That's a B-level year for "The Viper."

Finally, you might notice a lack of D's and F's in this year's edition. Keep in mind, the 50 wrestlers graded represent probably the top 50 wrestlers in America—the "honor students," if you will. Honor students rarely if ever earn D's and F's (they likely wouldn't be honor students if they did, would they?). Likewise, wrestlers worthy of D's and F's wouldn't be counted among the top 50. Again, if you want some more of this logic, I urge you to please turn to page 7.

Special thanks to Al Alven, Harry Burkett, Al Castle, Dave Lenker, Dan Murphy, and Bill Meltzer, for their contributions to this issue. As far as I'm concerned, you all get A's!

Frank Krewda
Editor-in-Chief

WRESTLING REPORT CARDS

STANLEY WESTON
Founder
(1919-2002)

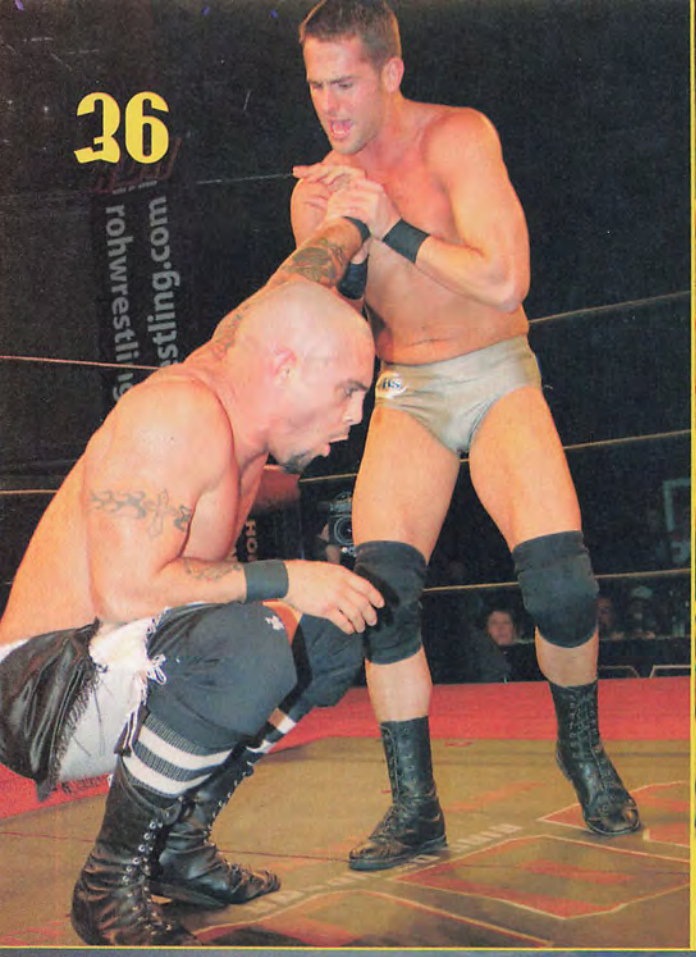
PUBLISHER
Stuart M. Saks
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Frank Krewda
PRODUCTION MANAGER
Bethany Lawler
PRE-PRESS DIRECTOR
Cliff Campo
IMAGING DIRECTOR
Jeff Smith
ART STAFF
Samantha Weyant
CONTRIBUTING DESIGNER
Greg Stevens
SENIOR WRITERS
David Lenker
Dan Murphy
Harry Burkett
Frank Ingiosi
Al Castle
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Al Alven
Matt Brock
Brian Solomon
Brady Hicks
Louie Dee
Bill Meltzer
Elizabeth A. Hunter
C.F. Hunter
Gerry Strauss
Mike Bessler
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Karen Powell
Jennifer Orehowsky
Jocelyn Mathis
CONTRIBUTING ARTIST
Jason Conlan
CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS
George Napolitano
Joe Zanolle
Timothy A. Walker
Mike Lano
Wayne McCarty
Buddy LaMantia
Scott Finkelstein
Duane Long
George Tahinos
Steve Beyer
Koichi Yoshizawa
Scott Romer
Matt Roberts
Dan McMillan

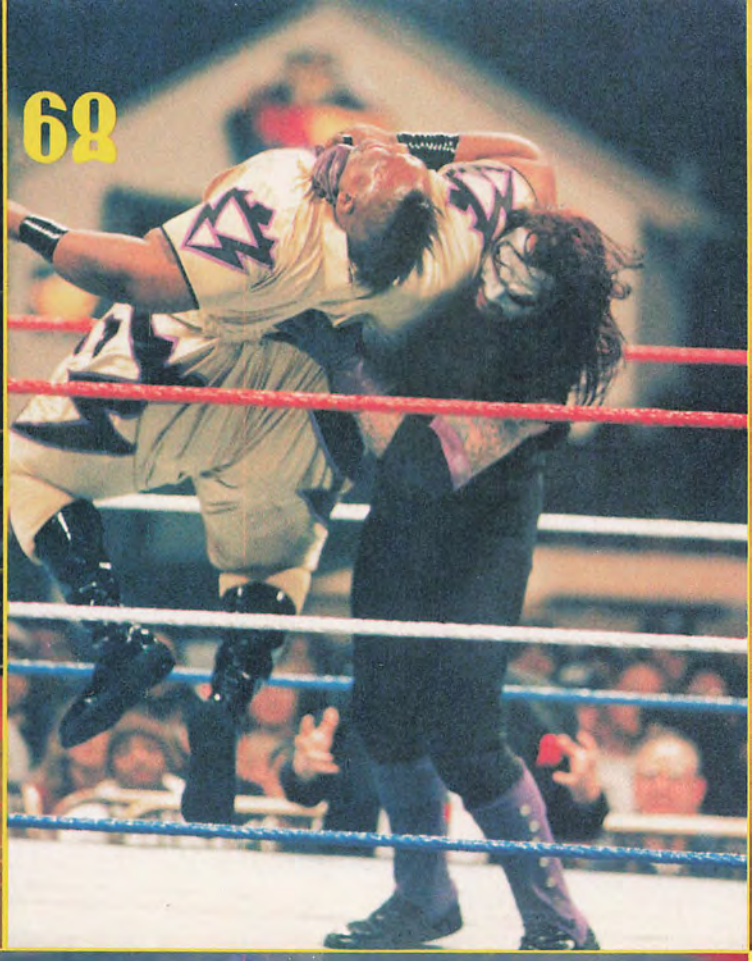
PRESIDENT
Despina McNulty
CIRCULATION DIRECTOR
David Tyler
NATIONAL CIRCULATION MANAGERS
Dave Hagman
RETAIL SERVICES DIRECTOR
Briana Coppola
ADVERTISING DIRECTOR
Connie Kolkka
(215) 643-6385
ckolkka@kappapublishing.com
SUBSCRIPTION INQUIRIES
Kappa Publishing Group Inc.
P.O. Box 433120
Palm Coast, FL 32143-3120
386-246-0114
CustSrvc@kappapublishing.com
386-246-0114

PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED (ISSN: 1043-7576), Vol. 32, No. 7, 2011, is published monthly, including four special issues, seven double issues, and the PWI Almanac, by Kappa Publishing Group Inc., 6198 Butler Pike, Suite 200, Blue Bell, PA 19422. Periodicals postage paid at Blue Bell, PA 19422, and additional post offices. Postmaster: Send change of address notices to: PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED, P.O. Box 433120, Palm Coast, FL 32143. Single copy price $9.95 U.S./Canada (£5.95 in U.K.). Subscription price $108.40 in the U.S. ($141.40 in Canada and Mexico, and $198.40 in remaining countries). Not responsible for the loss or non-return of unsolicited articles or photographs, which will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed envelope bearing the proper amount of postage.

The entire contents of this magazine are copyright ©2011 Kappa Publishing Group Inc. No part of this magazine may be reproduced without the written permission of the publisher. All rights reserved. Publisher is not responsible for the accuracy or content of any advertisements appearing in this magazine, nor the delivery or quality of merchandise or services offered. No endorsement of any such advertisement is intended or implied. Advertisers and agencies assume liability for claims arising from the content of their advertisements. FOR ADVERTISING INQUIRIES AND RATES: (215) 461-0583.
U.S. and Canadian distribution by Kable Distribution Services Inc., 14 Wall Street, Suite 4C, New York, NY 10022. International distribution by Worldwide Media Service Inc., 115 East 23rd St., New York, NY 10005. U.K. distribution by Comag, Tavistock Rd., West Drayton, Middlesex UB77QE, England.

Printed in U.S.A.


36
rohwrestling.com


68

126...
TNA
TNA

PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED PRESENTS

WRESTLING REPORT CARDS

JULY 2011 CONTENTS

3 Editor's Note
7 Introduction
8 John Cena
12 Mr. Anderson
16 Beer Money Inc.
20 Alberto Del Rio
24 Edge
28 Kane
32 CM Punk
36 Roderick Strong
40 Kurt Angle
44 Wade Barrett
48 Daniel Bryan
52 Christopher Daniels
56 Jeff Jarrett
60 Kings of Wrestling
64 Miz
68 Pro Wrestling Illustrated Presents The Undertaker: A Career Report Card
90 Sting
92 Eddie Edwards
94 Jeff Hardy
96 Kazarian
98 Kofi Kingston
100 The Motor City Machine Guns
102 Natalya
104 Randy Orton
106 Adam Pearce
108 Davey Richards
110 Rob Van Dam
112 Dolph Ziggler
114 D'Angelo Dinero
116 Madison Eagles
118 Madison Rayne
120 Homicide
122 Michelle McCool
124 Rey Mysterio Jr.
126 AJ Styles
128 The Big Show
130 Angelina Love
132 David Otunga
134 Cody Rhodes
136 Matt Hardy
138 Drew McIntyre
140 John Morrison
142 R-Truth
144 Santino Marella
146 Sheamus
148 Jack Swagger
150 The Undertaker
152 Eve Torres
156 Jay Lethal
158 Matt Morgan
160 Samoa Joe

Cover Photo: George Napolitano
Cover Design: Greg Stevens

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT www.pwi-online.com
CHECK OUT OUR BLOG AT prowrestlingillustrated.blogspot.com

Find us on Facebook

Look for the August 2011 edition of Pro Wrestling Illustrated, ON SALE MAY 24

INSIDE WRESTLING & THE WRESTLER JOINING FORCES TO SAVE YOU BIG BUCKS!

TAKE FULL ADVANTAGE AND SAVE NEARLY $30!

"Inside Wrestling and The Wrestler together in one issue? Perfect! I always bought them both anyway. Now I can have the best of both worlds and save money at the same time!"

– J.S., Boynton Beach, FL

Now every issue of INSIDE WRESTLING and THE WRESTLER is published in combination packages. Our widly successful 148-page "flip-flop" issues, with THE WRESTLER starting at one end and INSIDE WRESTLING starting at the other, is published six times annually.

THE SINGLE-COPY PRICE! 50% OFF THE SINGLE-COPY PRICE!

Clip Coupon and Send to:
KAPPA PUBLISHING GROUP INC.
PO Box 433133, Palm Coast, FL 32143-3133

A SUBSCRIPTION TO THE WRESTLER/ INSIDE WRESTLING IS THE WAY TO GO!

☐ Please send me a six-issue subscription to The Wrestler/Inside Wrestling Special for $29.85. **WSL**

Please indicate method of payment:

☐ Check or money order (enclosed and payable to Kappa Publishing Group, Inc.)

☐ VISA ☐ MasterCard

Card #_____

Expiration Date: ___/___ MO/YR

Signature:_____

NAME_____APT._____

ADDRESS_____STATE_____ZIP_____

CITY_____

☐ New Subscription ☐ Renewal

A0208T

For Canada and Mexico: $46.35 for 6 issues. All other countries: $74.85 for 6 issues. International money orders only in U.S. funds only. Airmail shipping only outside the U.S. Please allow up to eight weeks before you receive your first magazine. Offer expires December 31, 2011.

7818/03.21

REPORT CARDS

EACH YEAR, TWO issues of PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED are bound to generate controversy and ruffle feathers—the "*PWI* 500" issue and our annual Report Cards issue.

Unlike the "*PWI* 500," we only evaluate 50 of the sport's top stars in report card form. We hold those 50 wrestlers to a lofty standard, however. Not only are we evaluating their accomplishments over the course of the past year, but we're also analyzing their offensive and defensive repertoire, their career growth, and their marketability. We're also taking a good hard look at just how valuable each of those wrestlers are to their respective promotion, be it WWE, TNA, or Ring of Honor.

In scoring these wrestlers, the editors of PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED factor in a grading curve. We don't simply hand out A's to world champions, B's to secondary and tag team champions, and C's or D's to everyone else. While the pursuit of championship gold is a universal objective for every wrestler, other goals can come into play.

For John Cena, a worthwhile objective would be a lengthy reign as WWE champion. He fell short of that goal this year. Daniel Bryan, on the other hand, did not have nearly as much success as Cena did overall, but his primary goal for the year was simply to make an impact in WWE, which he did in a very big way.

To evaluate whether each wrestler achieved his or her potential over the past year, we grade them in Goal Achievement. We also grade them in the related category of Career Growth, which examines how each wrestler's achievements have helped him either advance or regress on his career path.

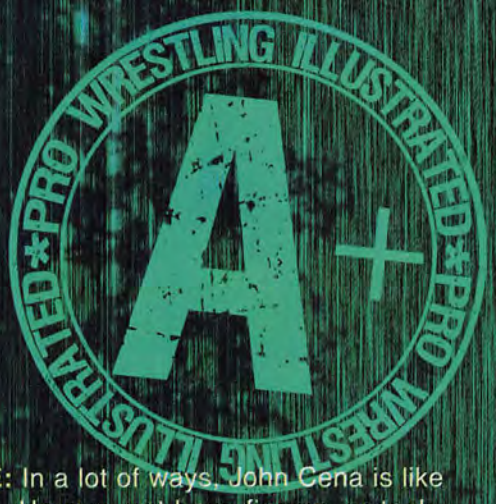
Perhaps the most controversial category is Repertoire. In this category, we carefully analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of each competitor featured, scrutinizing tapes and live events. We examined each wrestler's tendencies, habits, and overall abilities, and assigned a letter grade. To earn an A, a wrestler must demonstrate technical proficiency, exceptional defensive grappling, and a multi-faceted offense consisting of submission grappling, catch-as-catch-can, brawling, and aerial attacks.

Marketability refers to a wrestler's star power and charisma. Does the wrestler sell merchandise and tickets, or does the arena go silent when he makes his way to the ring? Whether it's fair or not, marketability is essential to a wrestler's long-term success. A wrestler can be a technical master, but if he doesn't put the proverbial "butts in the seats," his long-term prospects are dim.

Finally, we grade each competitor on Overall Value to his respective promotion or brand. A wrestler can be valuable in a variety of ways—by consistently wrestling great matches, by selling loads of merchandise, or by being a mentor to other wrestlers. A wrestler can be a mid-card player and be more vital to his promotion than a champion, depending on the role that wrestler plays. Obviously, this is the most important category, and if a wrestler achieves a high grade here, it renders the others somewhat meaningless (thus John Cena's A+ and his spot on the cover).

Keep in mind that this is not a review of a calendar year. Our grading period began just after WrestleMania 26 and ended just prior to WrestleMania 27. Also, it is important to note that we have selected 50 of wrestling's top stars to evaluate in this issue. Even the wrestlers who earned C's according to our criteria are major stars capable of winning world championships. Our editors can be strict graders, but we stand by the marks we have handed out.

JOHN CENA



GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: John Cena started off 2011 on a good note and earned a WWE title shot at WrestleMania, but that doesn't make up for a rough second-half of 2010. After dropping the WWE title to Sheamus, Cena spent nearly six months battling Wade Barrett and Nexus. He was even "fired" from WWE (though he still managed to show up on *Raw* every week). He eventually won the war against Barrett, but that feud steered him away from his one true goal: the WWE championship. Cena is back on track, but he wasted a lot of time.

GRADE: B-

MARKETABILITY: Simply put, Cena is the most marketable person in wrestling. Just take a look at how many Cen-Nation T-shirts fans wear to a typical WWE event. Case closed.

GRADE: A+

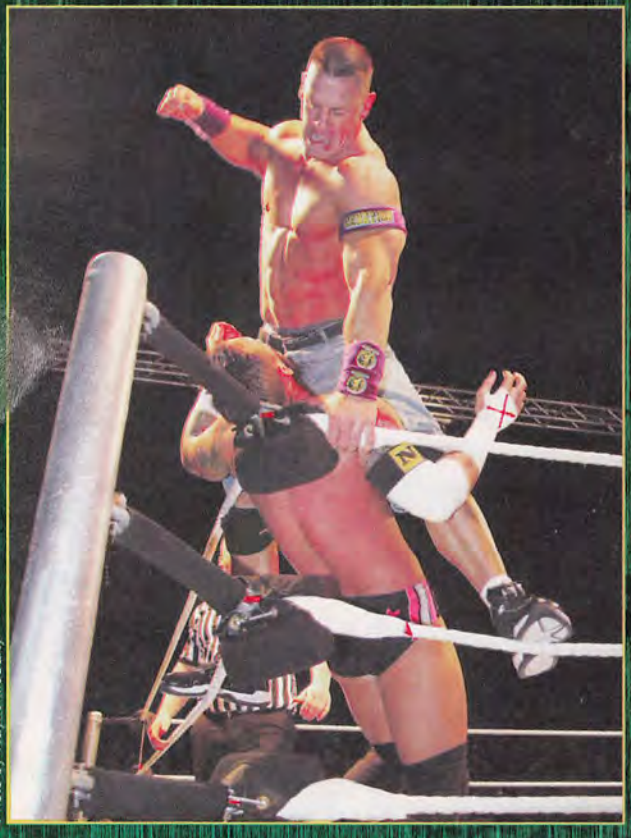


Photo by Wayne McCarty

REPERTOIRE: In a lot of ways, John Cena is like Rocky Balboa. He may not have finesse or technique, but he has power and guts, and that's usually enough for him to defeat most opponents. Cena is a basic brawler, relying on punches and slams to power his way through his matches. His vaunted Attitude Adjustment is really just a simple bodyslam, but the power and torque Cena puts behind the move makes it quite effective. Cena relies on high-impact moves, but he can also be sloppy; rushing from a clothesline into a bulldog, for example, and failing to achieve maximum impact with either move. He's not an especially talented counter-wrestler, but he can absorb a superhuman amount of punishment and keep coming back for more. He has done well with a limited move set, but tightening up his fundamentals would only improve his game.

GRADE: C+

CAREER GROWTH: Cena's prolonged feud with Nexus sidetracked him, but he put that behind him and got himself into position for a WWE title shot at WrestleMania. His back-and-forth promos with The Rock helped Cena regain some of his old edginess. He is unquestionably WWE's top star and franchise player, and there is every reason to expect he will retain that position through the foreseeable future. If he can manage to win over the diehard Cena haters, perhaps he'll finally get the universal respect he craves.

GRADE: A

OVERALL VALUE: Individually, the grades don't add up. How can a wrestler who earned a B- and a C+ end up with an A+ in Overall Value? Easy. John Cena isn't a perfect wrestler and he hasn't had a terrific year. But he is a ratings and merchandising juggernaut. He is WWE's mainstream ambassador and the most popular wrestler of the past decade. Despite his technical shortcomings, Cena is still WWE's Most Valuable Player. WWE is fortunate to have him ... and so is wrestling as a whole.

GRADE: A+

Photo by Wayne McCarty

©2010 World Wrestling Entertainment Inc. All Rights Reserved

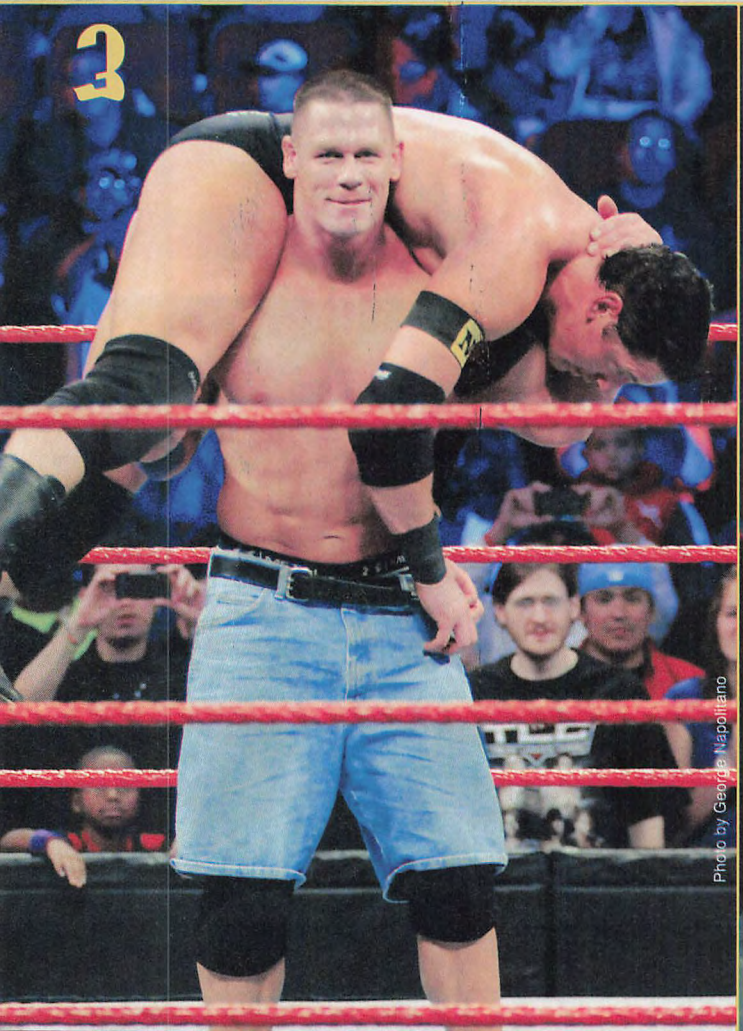


Photo by George Napolitano

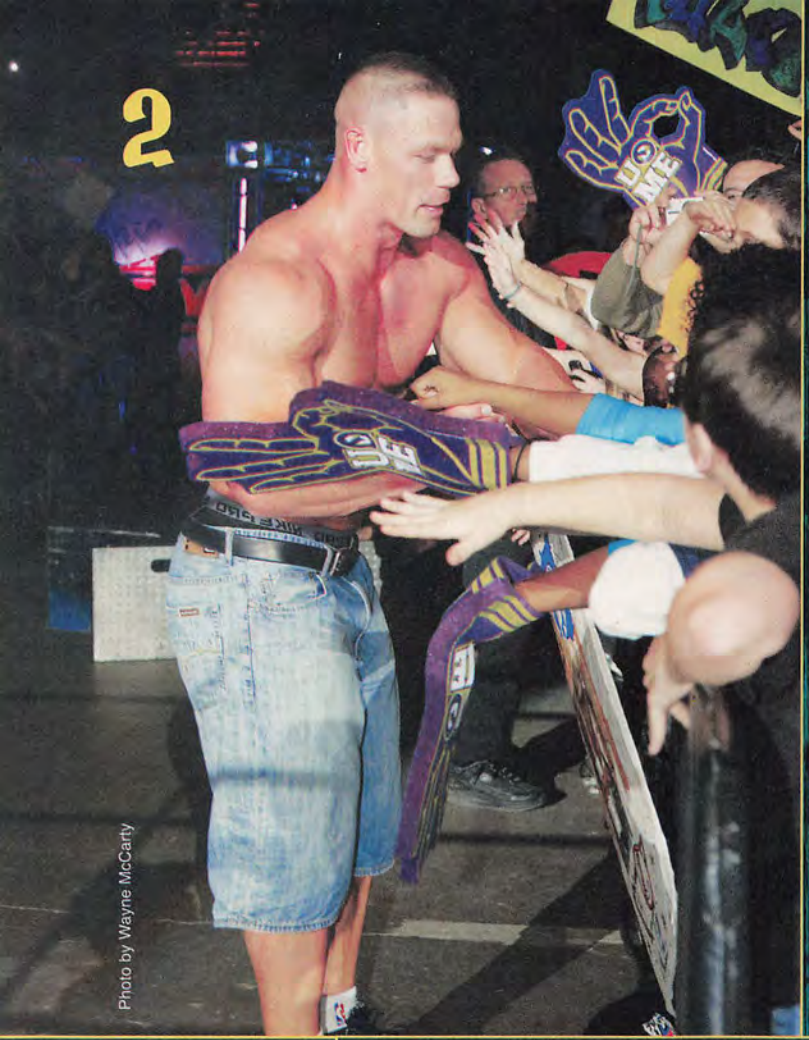


Photo by Wayne McCarty

JOHN CENA

1 2 3 4 5

One of Cena's goals over the past 12 months was removing Alex Riley as an obstacle to wrestling for Miz' WWE title at WrestleMania. Mission accomplished.

Though he has his critics, Cena has been the most popular WWE wrestler of the past decade and moves merchandise like no other.

It's no secret that Cena has a limited repertoire in the ring, yet his power and determination make maneuvers such as the Attitude Adjustment virtually indefensible, even for men the size of Wade Barrett.

Cena might have been chasing the WWE title at press time, but with or without the championship, he remains the face of WWE and a frequent guest on the late-night talk show circuit.

Cena's value to WWE extends beyond the T-shirts and pay-per-views he sells. He is also a vocal leader who will lend his support to young up-and-coming wrestlers like Evan Bourne, whom he has publicly touted as a future WWE star.

Photo by Dana Edelson/NBC Universal

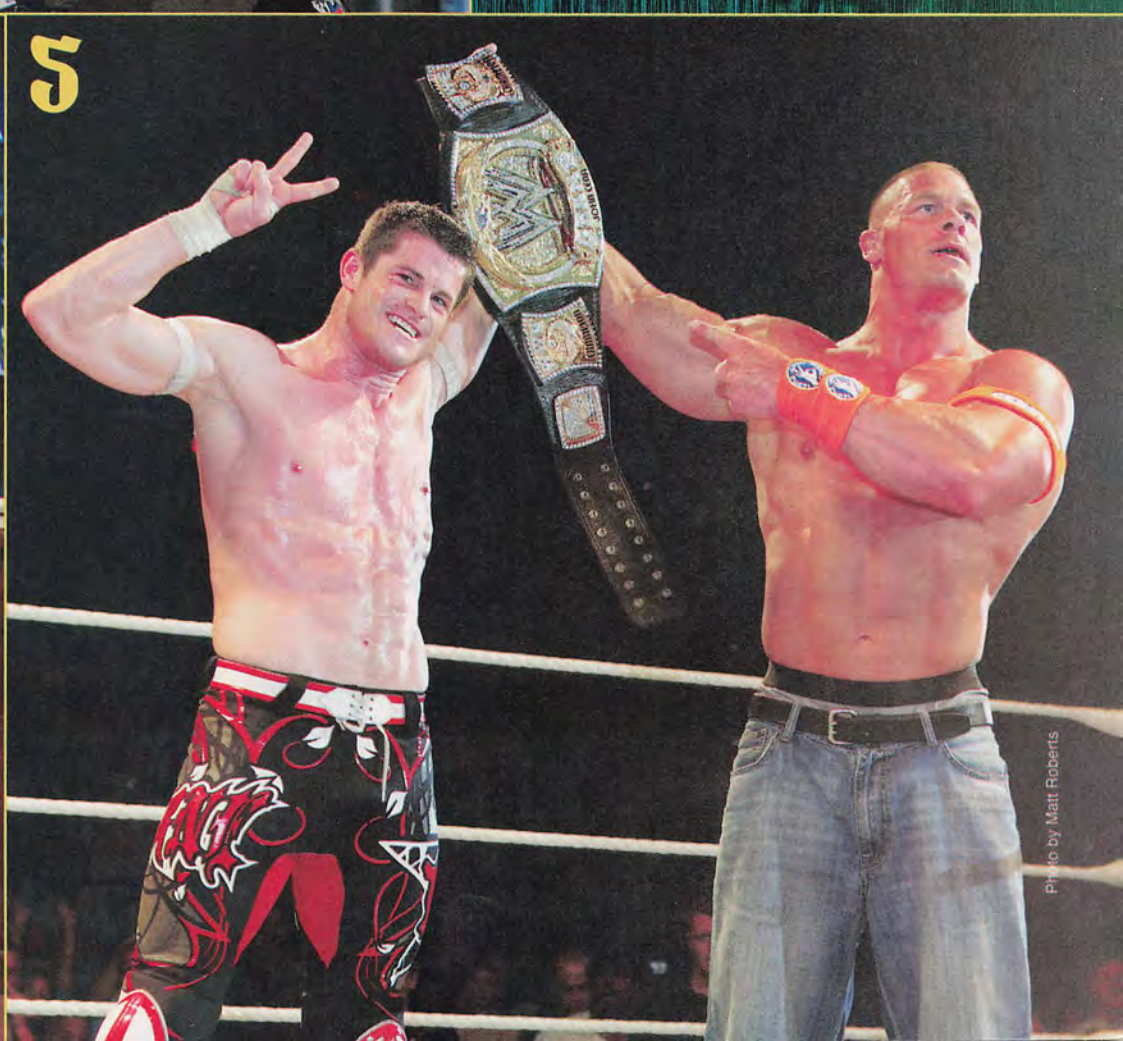


Photo by Matt Roberts

MR. ANDERSON

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: You can't spell Anderson without starting with a big A, and that's exactly what Mr. Anderson scores in the Goal Achievement category. Anderson pushed Kurt Angle to the limit during their 2010 feud, then went on to fulfill his potential by winning his first world championship. Anderson has become one of the most popular stars in TNA.

GRADE: A+

MARKETABILITY: Who could have predicted that his T-shirts would be so popular? Anderson takes pride in being an ass, and he has won over a legion of fans that feel the same way. Anderson is a captivating talker and a unique and charismatic competitor. When he takes the mike, there's no telling what he's about to do or say. That sort of unpredictability and attitude made D-X, Steve Austin, and the New World Order stars, and Anderson is the closest thing to that style of wrestler there is today.

GRADE: A

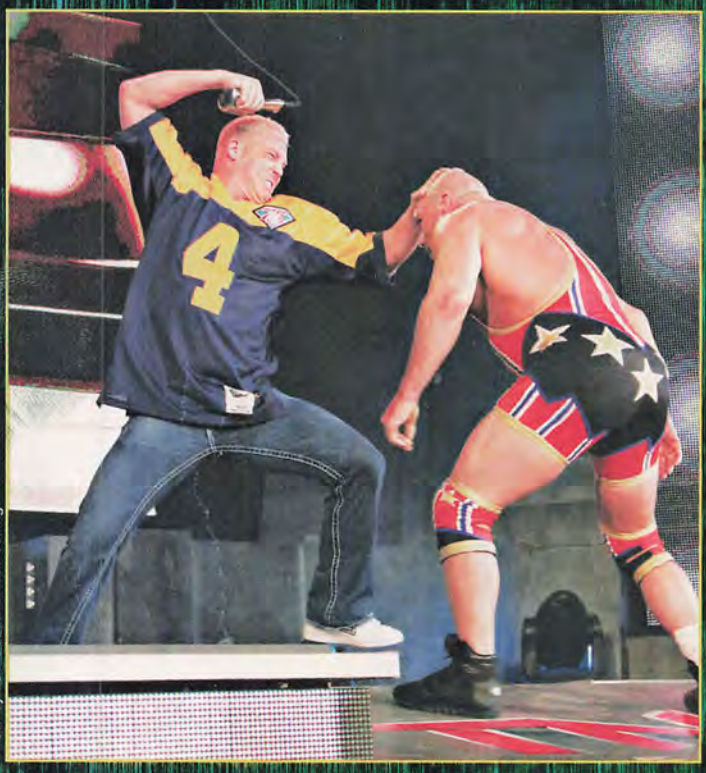


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

REPERTOIRE: We have had our reservations about Anderson's true skills. His great interviews often hid the fact that he was a mediocre wrestler with a finishing move (The Lambeau Leap) that was unwieldy and difficult to execute, especially against larger opponents. But Anderson proved his mettle during his war with Angle. A natural brawler, Anderson was strong enough on the mat to counter Angle and avoid being outwrestled. His Mic Check finisher gives him a dynamic move he can hit at any time against an opponent of any size. He can take to the air with his Ken-Ton Bomb, and is an underrated suplex artist, popping his hips forcefully enough to snap an opponent and achieve maximum impact. He's not an elite grappler, not an elite striker, and not an elite aerialist, but what he does, he does very well.

GRADE: A

CAREER GROWTH: After spending the past couple of years in relative obscurity, Anderson burst onto the scene in TNA in a big way last January, and he hasn't looked back. TNA has given him the freedom to be himself, and Anderson has thrived in that environment. He is an exciting, fresh personality that has given TNA a dash of cheekiness (no pun intended). Anderson has taken center stage, and it suits him.

GRADE: A

OVERALL VALUE: The difference between Mr. Anderson and some of the other big names who debuted along with the Hogan/Bischoff regime is that the others made an immediate impact and dropped off a bit. Anderson made a lesser impact that gets bigger with each passing month. He defeated Jeff Hardy for the TNA World championship and is very likely to get many more title shots in 2011. He is one of TNA's biggest merchandise movers and is one of the company's top draws. More importantly, he gives TNA a new attitude, one the company has lacked for some time. In short, Anderson is a godsend to TNA … and he knows it.

GRADE: A

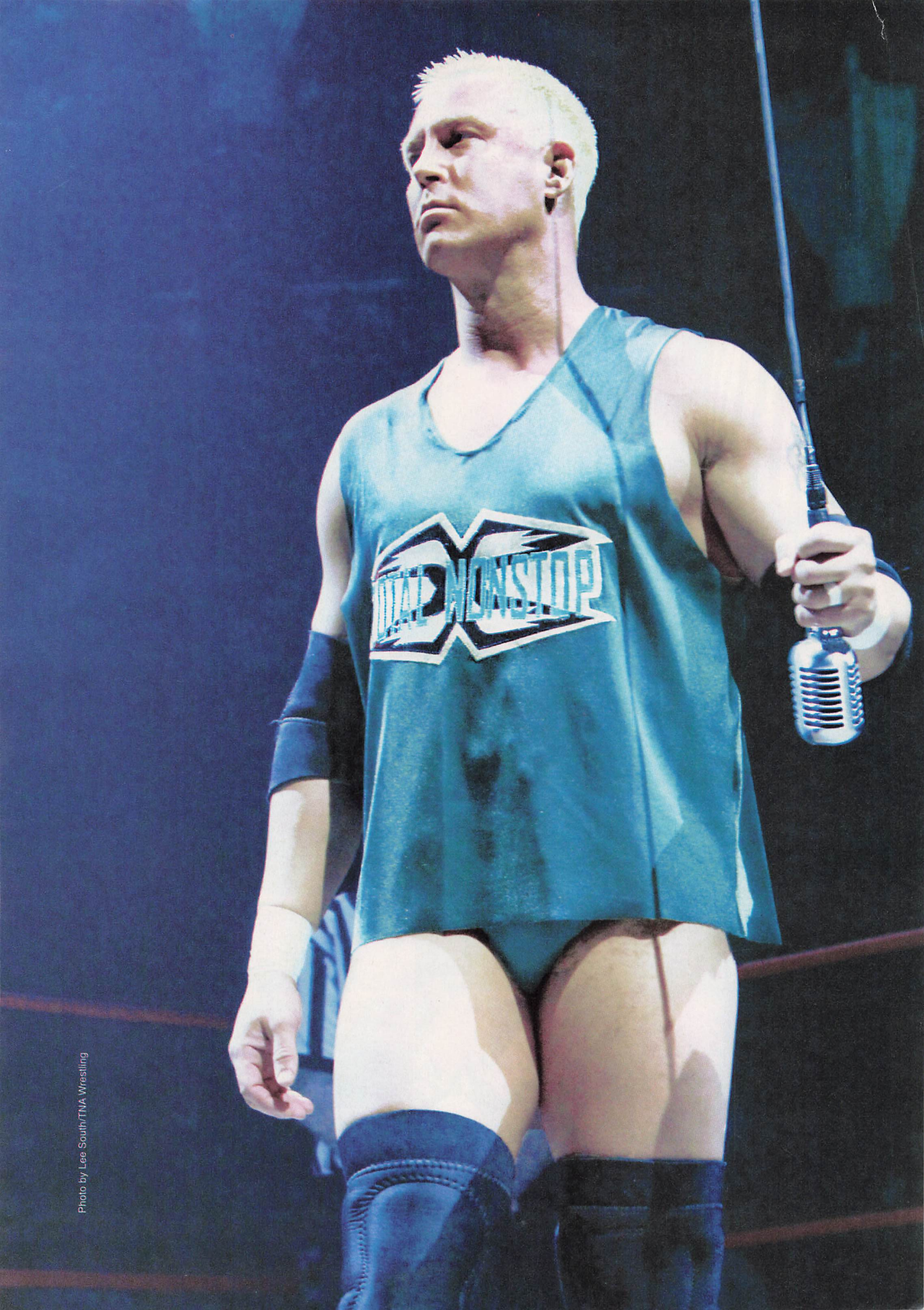
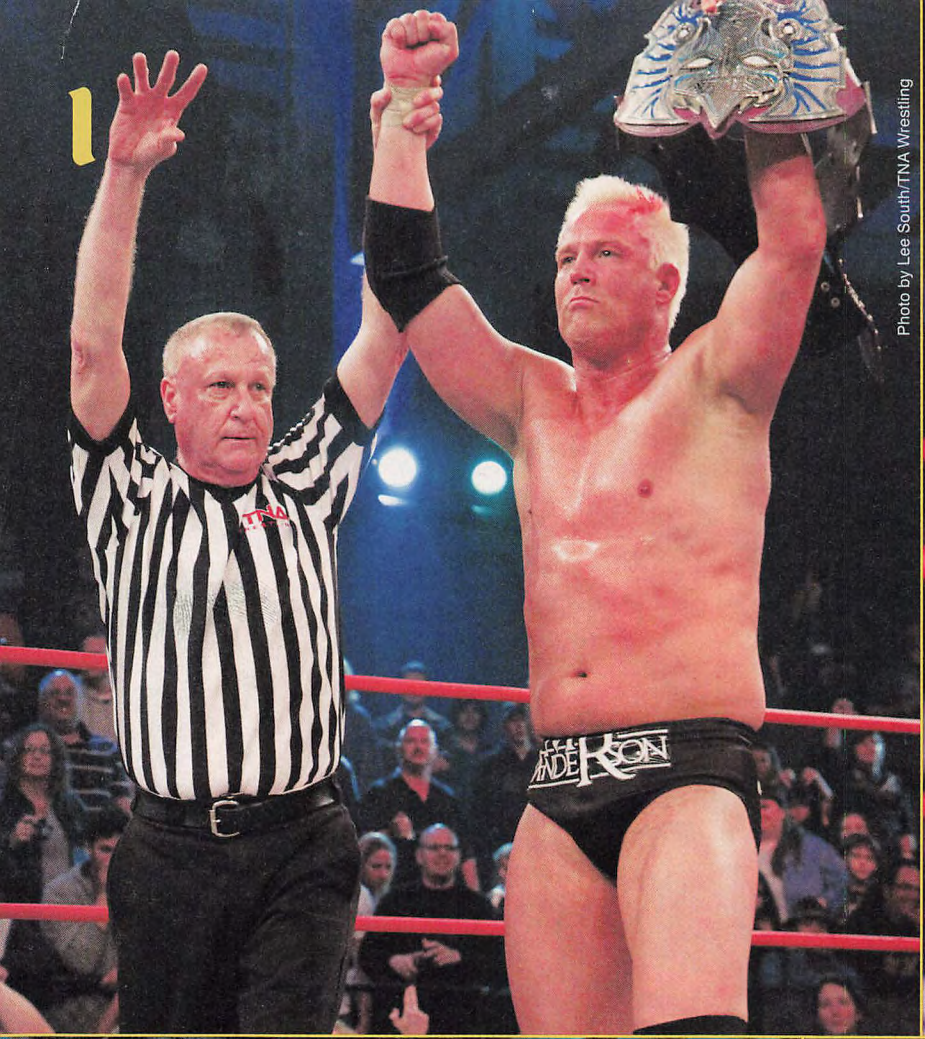
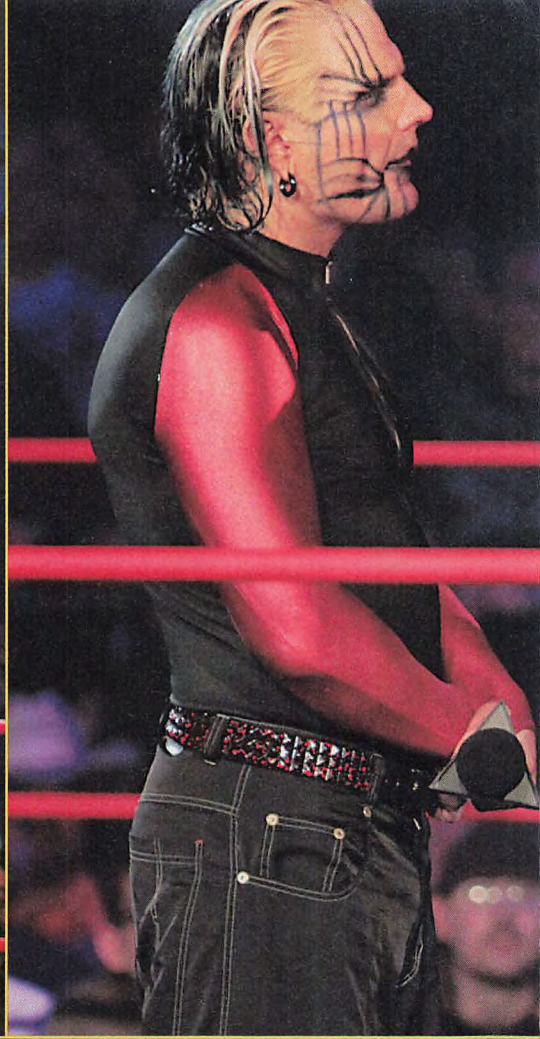
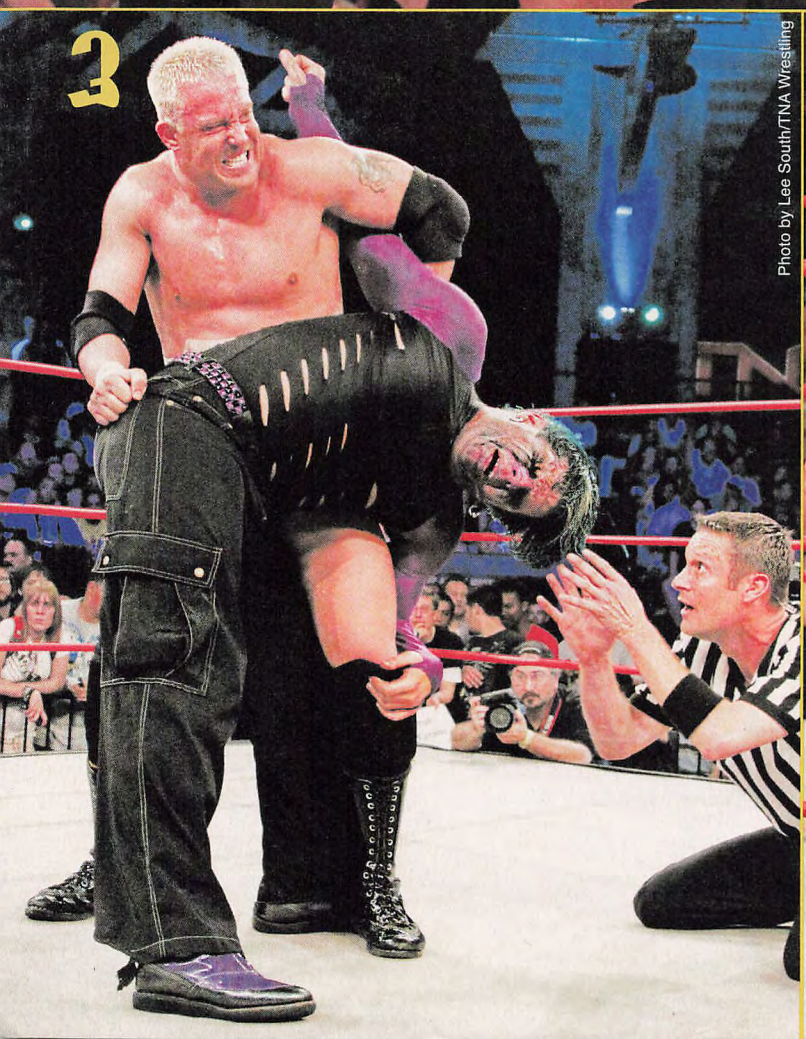
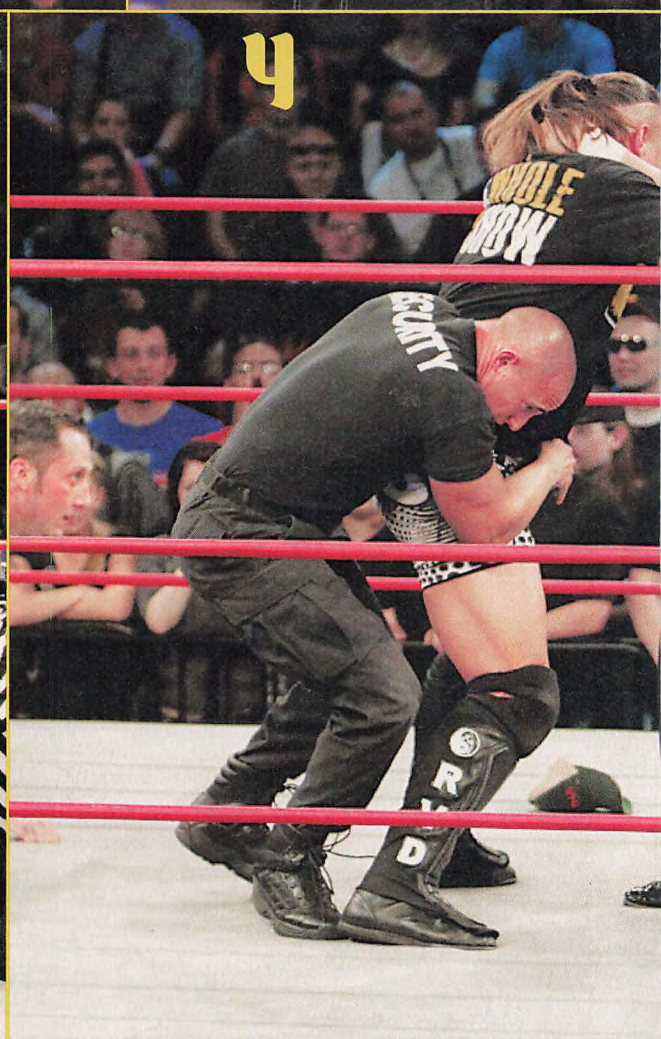


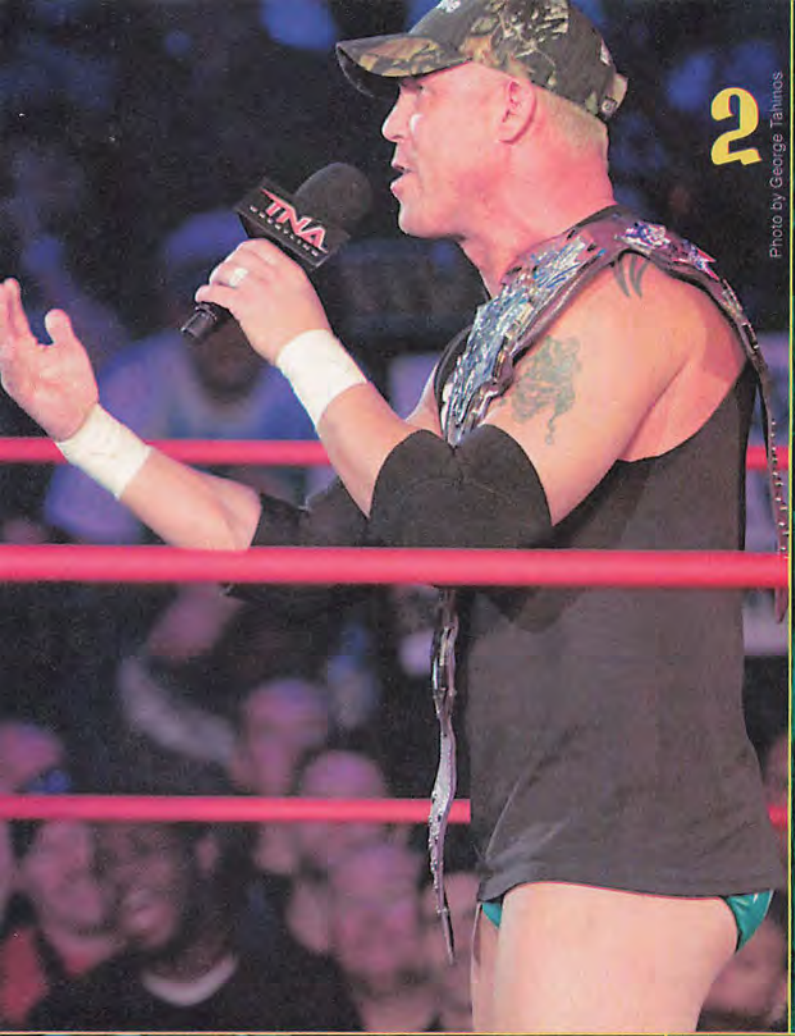
Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling


1
TNA
Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling




3
Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling


4



2

Photo by George Tahinos

MR. ANDERSON

1 2 3 4 5

Anderson finally lived up to the high expectations so many had for him when he went to TNA and defeated Jeff Hardy for the TNA World title at Genesis.

Thanks to his feud with Jeff Hardy, who gives Anderson ample cause to run his mouth, Anderson has become a hotter commodity in TNA than he ever was in WWE.

Though he's no great technician, Anderson's repertoire is well-rounded enough to give him tremendous versatility in the ring. How often does somebody snare Jeff Hardy in an abdominal stretch?

Unlike his spot in WWE, Anderson's role in TNA is as a true main-event performer. Accordingly, he gets to square off against other headliners such as Rob Van Dam. No question, Anderson's career has grown since coming to TNA.

The upside of Anderson's big mouth is that it always keeps him battling TNA's best wrestlers such as RVD. In the past year, however, Anderson has been able to back up his talk. As long as he antagonizes other wrestlers—and has high-quality matches against them—TNA will never muzzle Anderson.

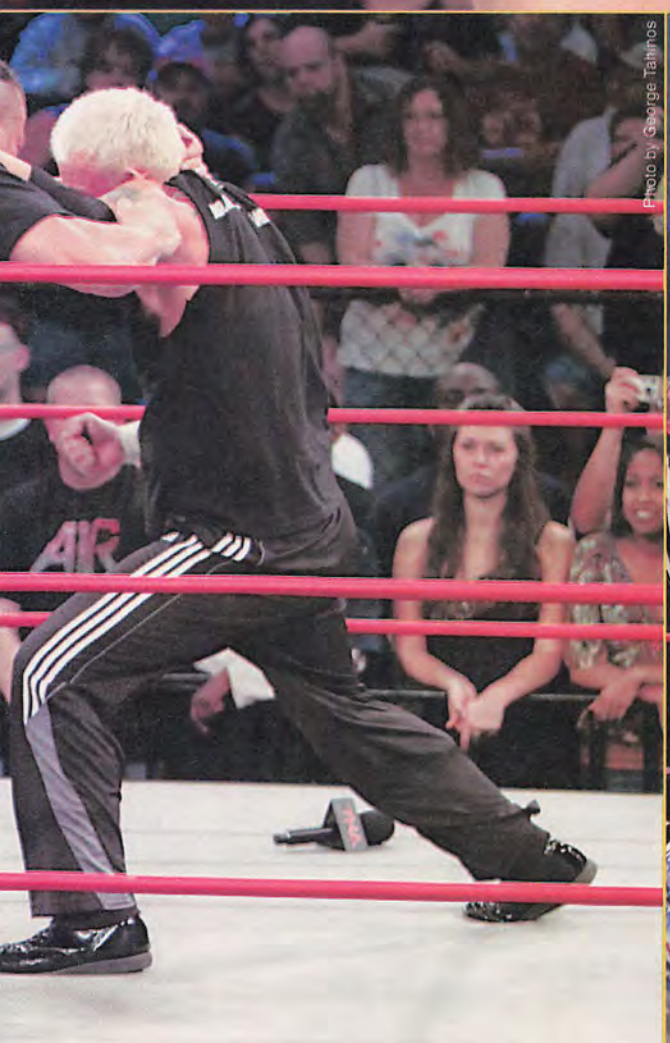


Photo by George Tahinos

5

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

BEER MONEY INC.

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: A year ago, Robert Roode was a nouveau-riche jerk and James Storm was a drunken hillbilly. Well, Roode is still a rich jerk and Storm is still a drunk, but Beer Money has become the most popular tag team in TNA. Beer Money came out on the losing end of the best-of-five series against The Motor City Machine Guns, but they managed to rebound by joining Fortune. Since winning their fourth TNA tag team title at Genesis, the team has been on a tear. After a pronounced slump, they are back to their winning ways.

GRADE: B+

MARKETABILITY: Beer Money has one of the most popular T-shirts in TNA. They also have a vocal fan following. In many ways, Roode and Storm are a throwback to classic tag teams like The Minnesota Wrecking Crew. They have chemistry and charisma, along with a great team name and a championship mentality. In a promotion flooded with WWE castoffs and WCW alumni, Beer Money is a homegrown team with an old-school flair and a new-school attitude. They have also found themselves in one of TNA's top storylines as Fortune takes on Immortal, which puts them in a prominent spot on the card.

GRADE: A

REPERTOIRE: Storm and Roode have perfected a variety of effective double-team maneuvers. In addition to their DWI power bomb neckbreaker, they also use an assortment of double-suplexes, slam/neckbreaker combinations, and a very efficient slingshot/DDT. What sets Beer Money apart from other teams, though, is that both Roode and Storm are solid singles competitors. If one of them is unable to make a tag, or if one needs a rest outside the ring, either Storm or Roode is capable of transitioning into singles mode and carrying the match as long as necessary. The biggest knock on Beer Money has been their tendency to get lazy or underestimate opponents. However, now that they've joined Fortune, both Storm and Roode seem more focused and motivated than ever.

GRADE: A

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

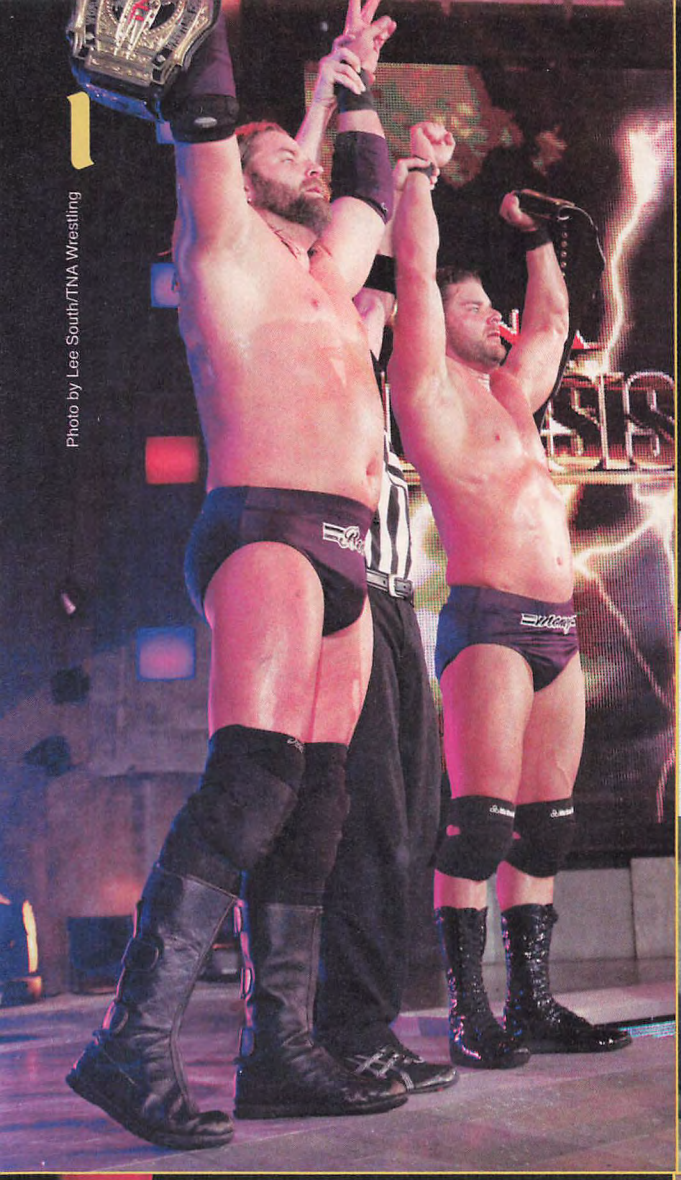
CAREER GROWTH: Beer Money has held the TNA tag team title on four occasions and is widely regarded as one of the top teams in wrestling. But they are finally showing signs of maturity. Storm and Roode have cut back on the goofing off and are taking a stand against Hulk Hogan and Immortal. Beer Money is showing principles and transitioning into a leadership role in TNA.

GRADE: A

OVERALL VALUE: As fan favorites, Roode and Storm represent the heart and soul of TNA. In addition to being an elite tag team, Roode and Storm are TNA originals that persevered and are finally getting their moment at the top of the card. They are models for any young TNA talent, proving that hard work and dedication can yield results.

GRADE: A

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

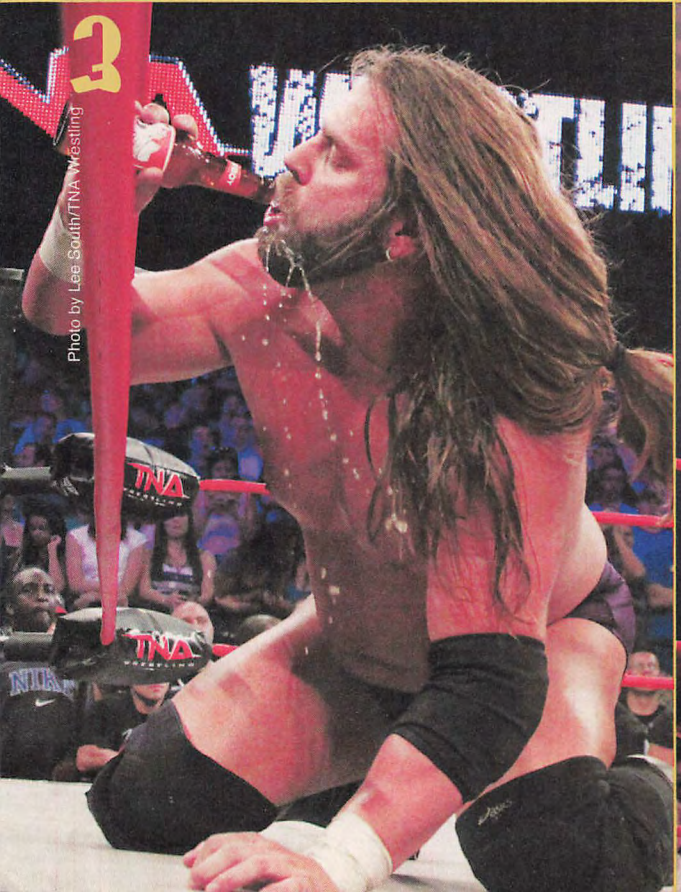


1

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

2

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

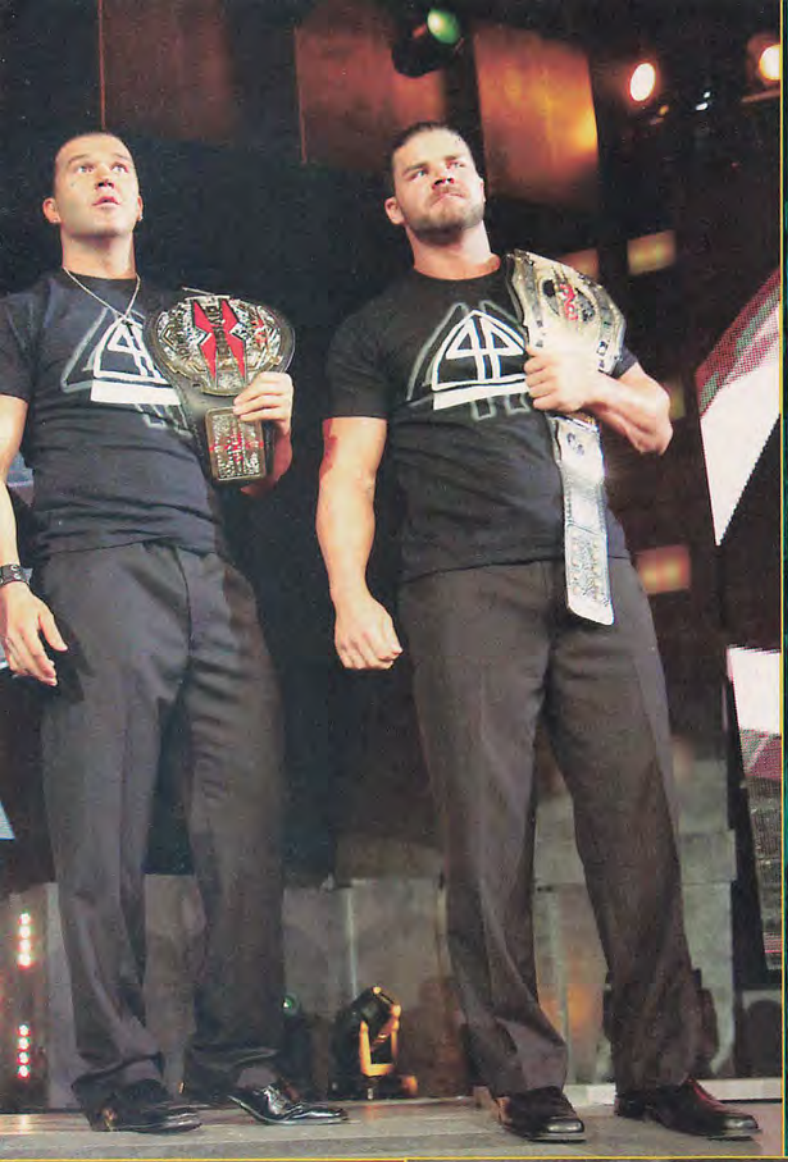


3

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

4

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



BEER MONEY INC.

1 2 3 4 5

By winning their fourth TNA tag team title at Genesis, Beer Money established themselves as an elite team not just in TNA, but in all of wrestling.

How do four-time tag team champs advance their careers? By joining an elite group to take on one of the most powerful factions in wrestling. By going to war on behalf of Fortune against Immortal, Storm and Roode have all but guaranteed themselves a visible spot high on the TNA card.

Part of Beer Money's appeal to fans is that while they take care of business in the ring, Storm and Roode don't seem to take themselves too seriously while they're doing it.

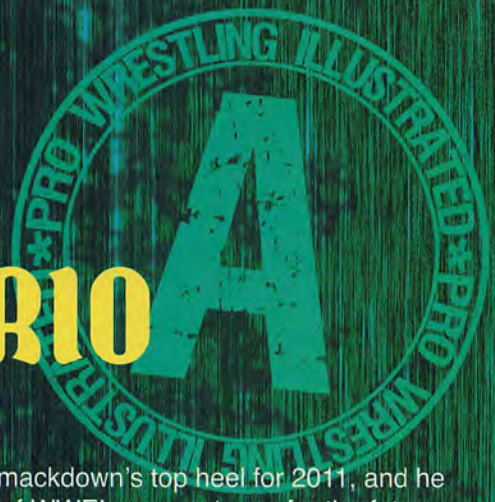
Like all great tag teams, Storm and Roode have the double-team down to a science. However, unlike many former great tandems, both Storm and Roode are excellent singles grapplers, which only makes them stronger as a unit.

With Roode and Storm being original TNA members, Beer Money Inc. serves as an example to young talent that staying with the promotion and working hard can lead to good things. Storm and Roode are becoming leaders in the locker room.

5

Photo by Late South/TNA Wrestling

ALBERTO DEL RIO



GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: When former Dos Caras Jr. said it was "his destiny" to win the World championship, we believed him. The son of the legendary luchador Dos Caras (and the nephew of Mil Mascaras), Del Rio is lucha libre royalty. He made an instantaneous impact in WWE and won the Royal Rumble. Less than eight months after his WWE debut, Del Rio landed a World title shot at WrestleMania. He has come a long way in a very short period of time, and he has made it look easy.

GRADE: A+

MARKETABILITY: Even though he is a rulebreaker, Del Rio has the potential to be one of WWE's most marketable attractions. His Mexican heritage makes him an easy sell to Latino television audiences, and Del Rio will certainly be a featured wrestler for any WWE tours of Mexico. With his personal ring announcer, Ricardo Rodriguez, Del Rio has the arrogant swagger and confidence of a champion. He is poised to be Smackdown's top heel for 2011, and he should be one of WWE's cornerstones for the future.

GRADE: B+

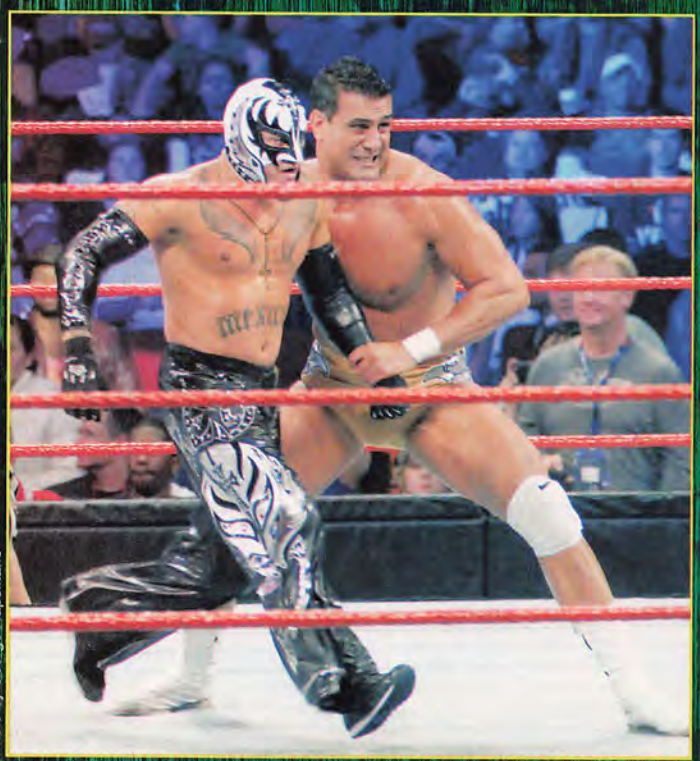


Photo by George Napolitano

REPERTOIRE: Del Rio has unveiled a vicious cross armbreaker, but there's a whole lot of offense he hasn't revealed in WWE yet. Del Rio trained in lucha libre, and he is a master of rolling cradles, lightning-quick reversals, and aerial attacks. In Mexico, he was known for an impressive gorilla press German suplex. He is also an accomplished shootfighter and has an array of martial arts strikes, kicks, and chokes in his arsenal. He has faced a diverse array of opponents through his career, including famed shootfighter Mirko Cro Cop, Dr. Wagner Jr., and Rey Mysterio Jr.. He can protect himself, and he takes sadistic joy in injuring his opponents. In short, he is much more formidable than many fans—and many of his peers—realize.

GRADE: A

CAREER GROWTH: Del Rio was a star in Mexico long before he arrived in WWE. Few wrestlers have been able to make the transition from lucha libre to the American style as quickly and smoothly as Del Rio has been able to. Only Mysterio, Eddie Guerrero, and Chris Jericho have made the transition as well, and none of them did it anywhere near as quickly. He is on the verge of WWE superstardom and has the potential to remain on top for a long time to come. All that talk of "destiny" may just have a grain of truth to it.

GRADE: A

OVERALL VALUE: Today, Del Rio may not be one of WWE's most valuable assets, but he's certainly an investment that looks like it will pay off huge future dividends. He is a multifaceted wrestler: a shootfighter with power, international experience, and an impeccable pedigree. He has star quality, international drawing power, and appeal. He hasn't quite hit his stride yet, but Del Rio is poised for greatness.

GRADE: A

Photo by George Napolitano

1

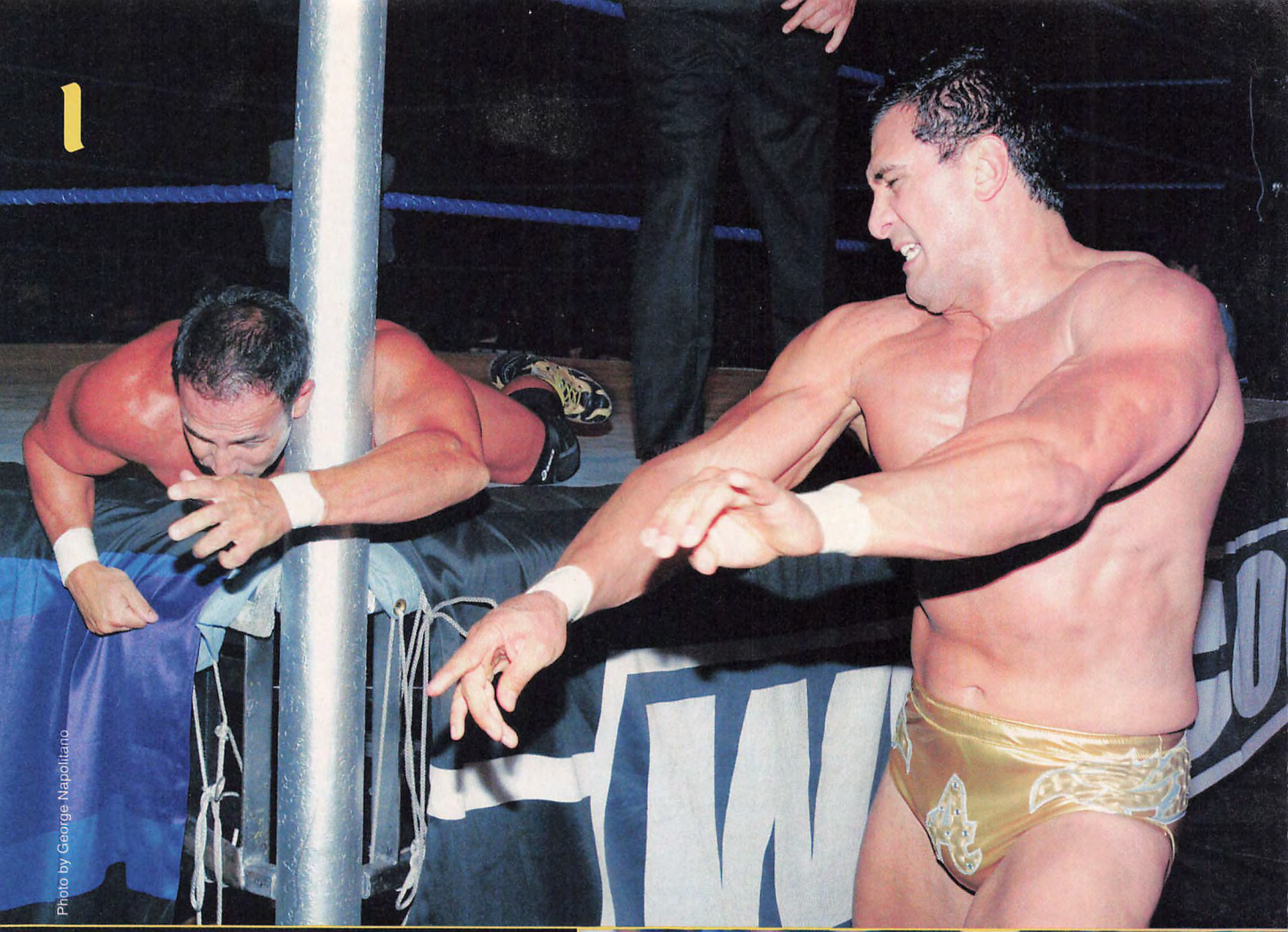


Photo by George Napolitano

3

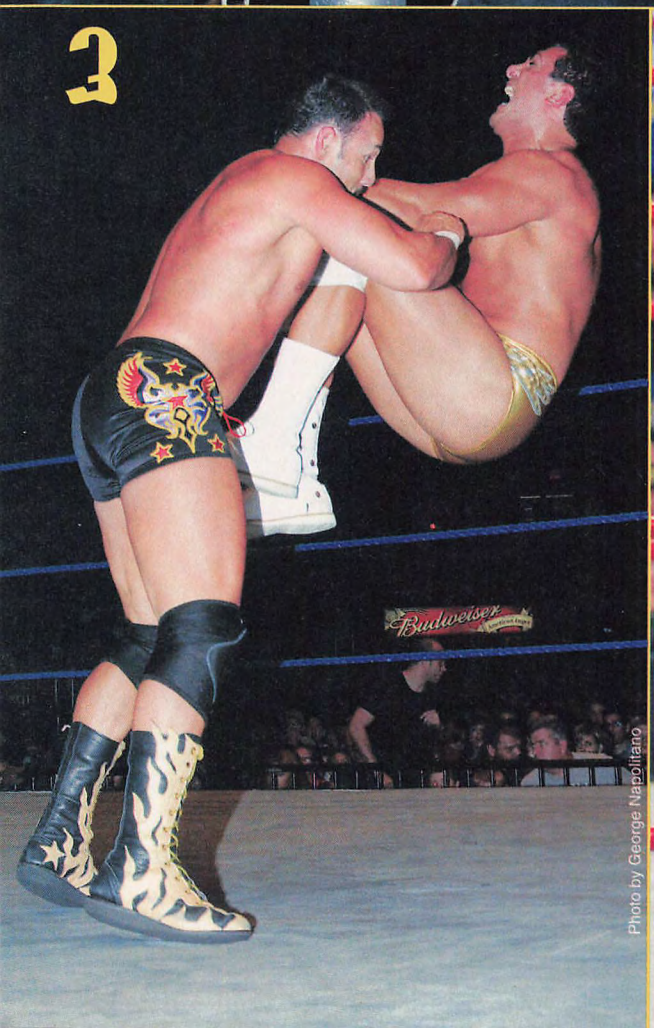
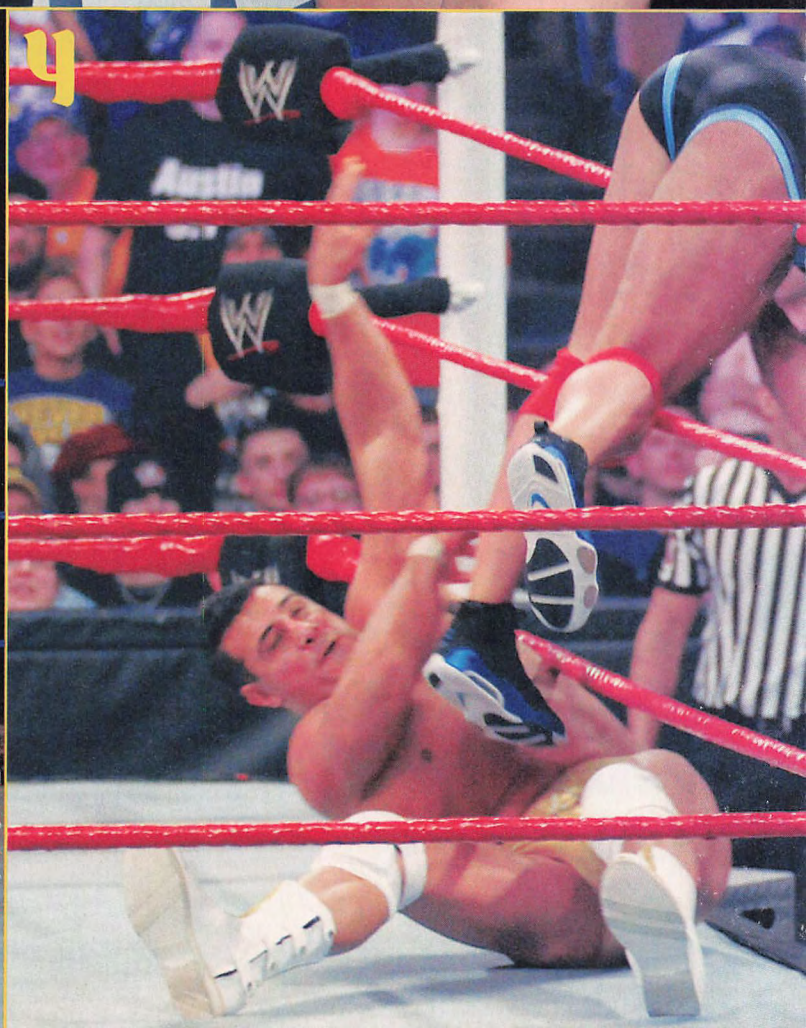
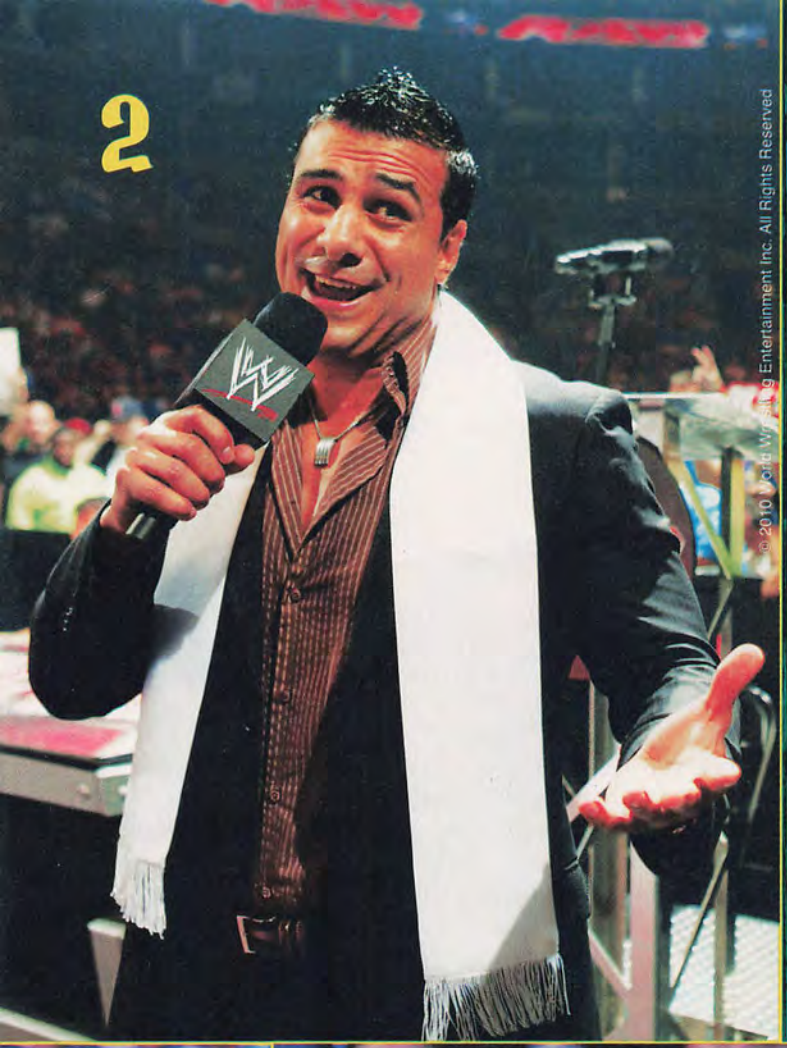


Photo by George Napolitano

4





© 2010 World Wrestling Entertainment Inc. All Rights Reserved

ALBERTO DEL RIO

1 2 3 4 5

Alberto Del Rio considers it his destiny to be a WWE world champion. Whether it was taking on Chavo Guerrero Jr. in dark matches or performing at WrestleMania, Del Rio has met most of his goals.

With so many natural tools, Del Rio should be one of WWE's most marketable wrestlers. However, his arrogance has prevented him from connecting with some fans.

Del Rio's experience in Mexico and MMA make him a dangerous opponent for any wrestler. Guerrero Jr. learned a thing or two about Del Rio's ring acumen when they met.

What can be said about the year Del Rio turned in? Eliminating Santino Marella to win The Royal Rumble earned Del Rio the most prominent spot at the most prominent wrestling show of the year. How's that for career growth?

Though he may not be on the same level as Kane or other WWE stars quite yet, WWE is banking on Del Rio to lead their push into Mexico and other Hispanic markets. Indeed, in his short time with WWE, Del Rio has become quite a valuable asset.

Photo by George Napolitano

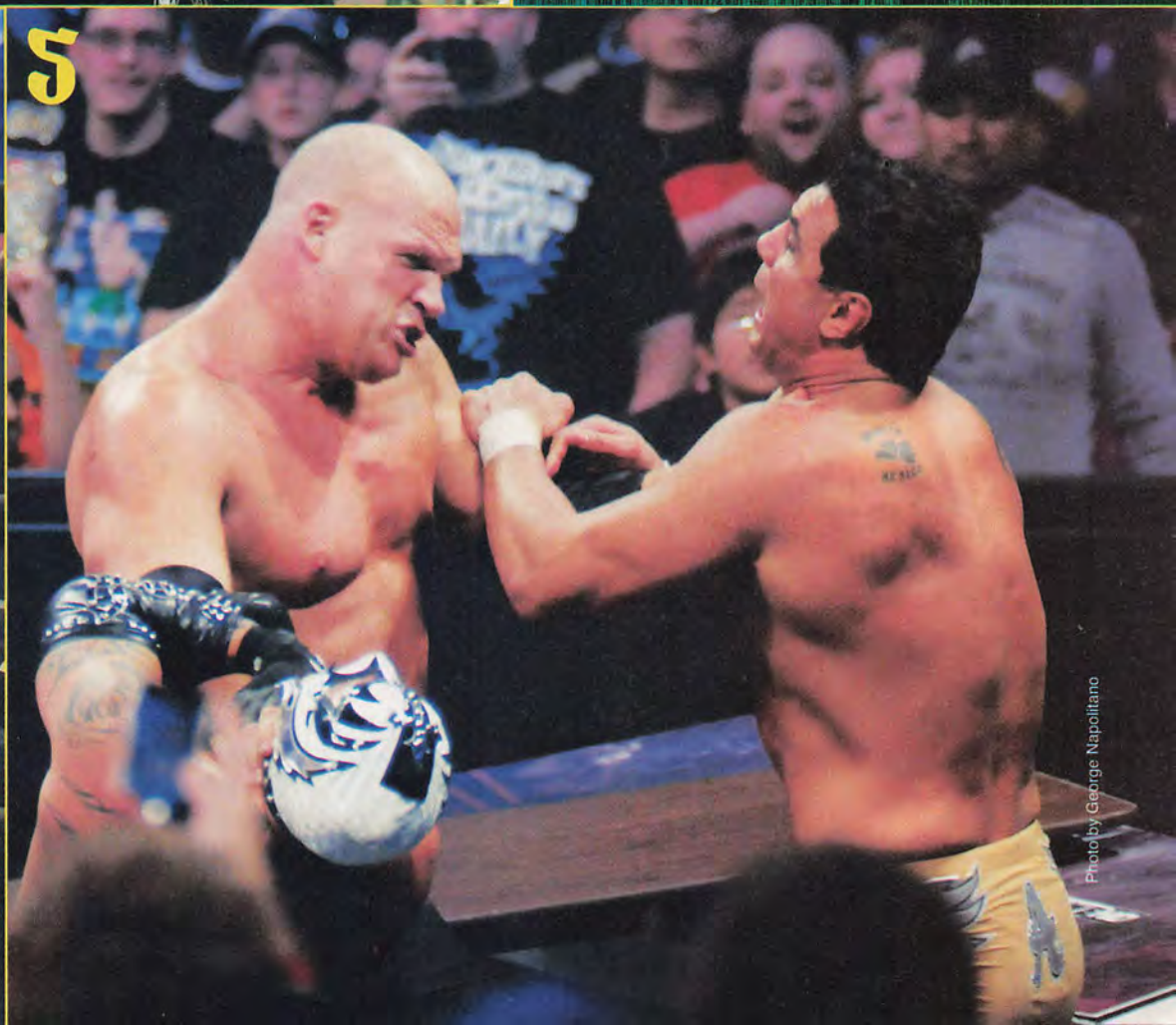


Photo by George Napolitano

EDGE

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Edge has had more than his share of ups and downs over the past year. The 2010 Royal Rumble champion earned a WrestleMania 26 title shot against Chris Jericho, but he went home empty-handed. He spent most of the summer fruitlessly chasing the championship. A heel turn and a bizarre feud with the anonymous Raw GM kept him sidetracked, until he was traded to the Smackdown brand and finally pulled himself together. After joining the blue brand, Edge won the World title and established himself as the top fan favorite. It was a long and circuitous road, but Edge finally arrived at his destination.

GRADE: A

MARKETABILITY: How marketable can a "Rated R Superstar" be in a PG WWE Universe? Actually, Edge is still quite marketable, though he has certainly lost the risqué persona who partook in "live sex celebrations" and bloody hardcore matches. Edge is tremendously popular and is a proven main-event talent who has headlined WrestleMania. He may not have the star quality of a John Cena or Undertaker, but he's certainly on the next level, alongside Rey Mysterio Jr. and Randy Orton. He also has some of the most stylish and popular T-shirts of any WWE star, which is a true gauge of a wrestler's marketability.

GRADE: B+

Photo by George Napolitano

REPERTOIRE: Edge is perennially underrated when it comes to his move set. People tend to fixate on his speaking; even Edge is guilty of this from time to time. But Edge also has one of the most effective DDT variations in the sport. He has been known to use both the traditional Sharpshooter and an inverted version, as well as the STF and a variety of armlocks. He's a skilled mat wrestler who can weaken opponents and then put them away with a high-impact move. Edge can hold his own against just about anyone. Take the spear out of his arsenal, and he's still very dangerous. He just needs to remember that.

GRADE: A-

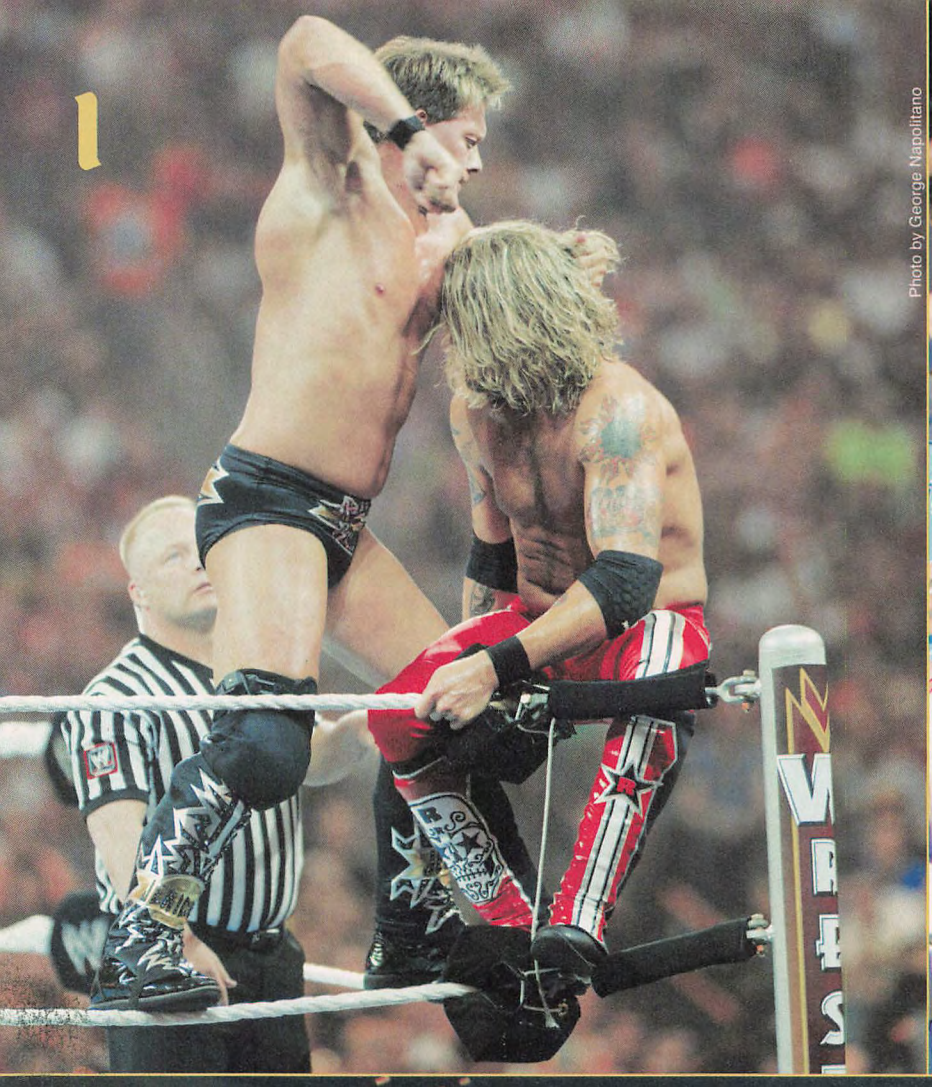
CAREER GROWTH: It's hard to believe, but Edge is an 10-time world champion. If he hadn't been hampered by injuries, there's no telling how much more he could have achieved. His title reigns have been brief and often marred by rulebreaking. By cleanly winning and defending the World title, Edge is reminding people that he is a future Hall-of-Famer and not just an "ultimate opportunist." In recent interviews, Edge has hinted at retirement. Though he could probably compete for another 10 years, it seems like Edge is beginning to focus on his legacy. If that's the case, now is the time for him to shine.

GRADE: A

OVERALL VALUE: Edge is the most decorated wrestler in WWE history, with more than 30 championships to his credit. He's a versatile competitor, a great promo man, and a superb wrestling talent. If he does choose to retire, Edge will leave a major void in WWE. He is perhaps the most underrated talent in WWE today. While Edge has never been positioned as WWE's flagbearer, he has been consistently exciting WWE fans for 13 years.

GRADE: A

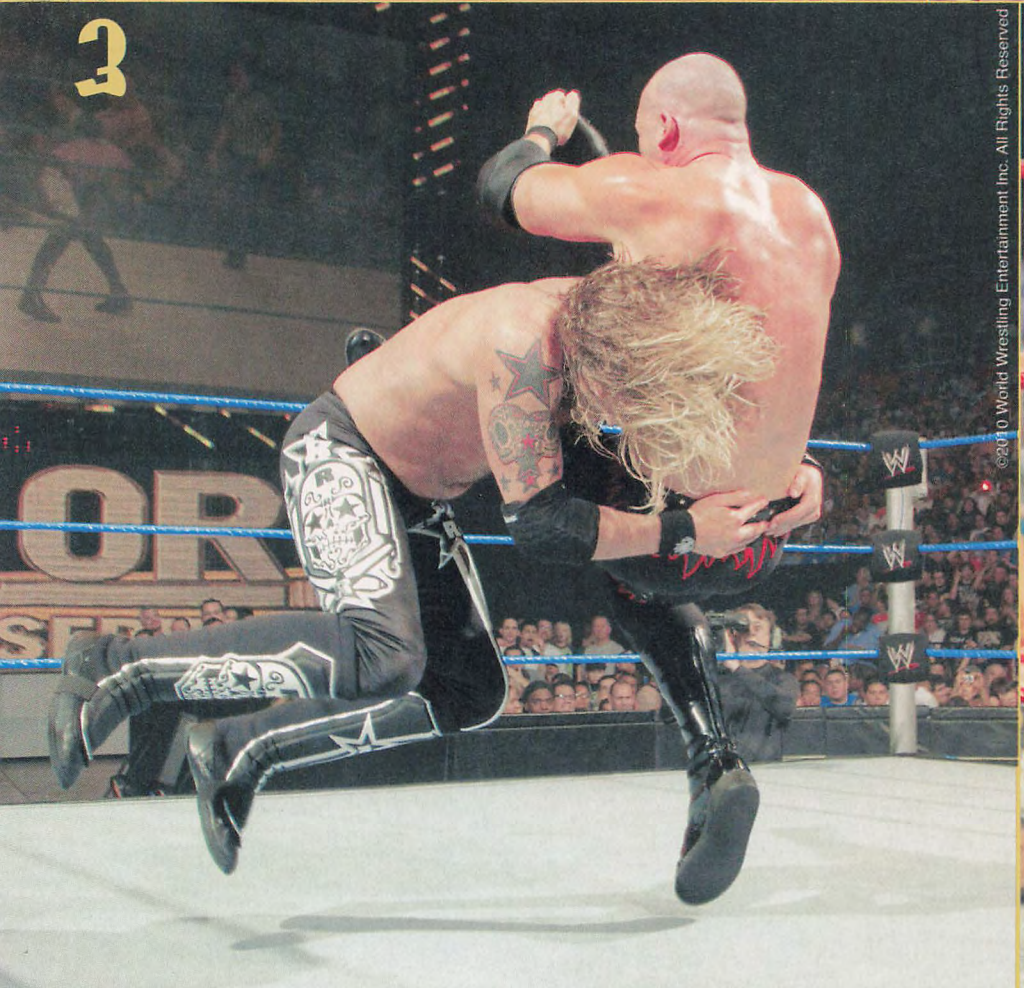
Photo by George Napolitano



1

2

Photo by George Napolitano



3

©2010 World Wrestling Entertainment Inc. All Rights Reserved.

4

Photo by Stu Saks

EDGE

1 2 3 4 5

Edge didn't get Jericho's World title at WrestleMania 26, but he did get some revenge on his former tag team partner by spearing him though a ringside barricade after the match.

Along with the World title, Edge recaptured the hearts of the fans as a member of Smackdown. When Edge is in the fans' good graces, he is an incredibly marketable wrestler.

Though he'll take to the mat and the air at times, Edge's game is really based on power, which he demonstrates here with a spear on Kane.

Edge has the goods to go toe-to-toe with Cena and any other WWE headliner. As an all-around performer, Edge is quite underrated.

Aside from being a pioneer of ladder matches, Edge is also the most decorated wrestler in WWE history. When he retires, which he's been hinting at, Edge's absence will leave a major void.

Photo By George Napolitano

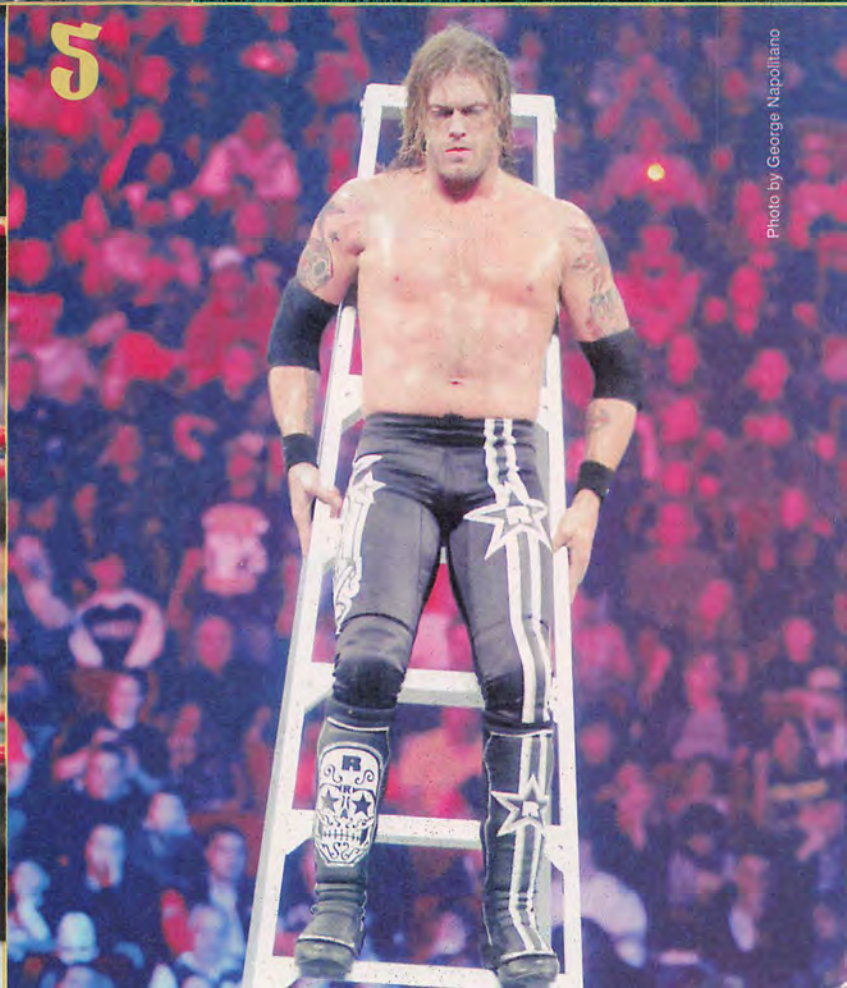


Photo by George Napolitano

KANE

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: After 12 long years (plus three weeks, but who's counting?), Kane finally shed the label of one-day world champion. For those who can't remember or weren't with us, masked Kane held the WWF World title for less than 24 hours in June 1998. He may not have said so, but that ate and ate and ate at him. It might have been better never to have won the title. Well, he was the surprise winner of this summer's Smackdown Money in the Bank ladder match at the PPV of the same name. He cashed in his title shot and won the World title by beating Rey Mysterio Jr. later that night. A tainted win, sure, but he just had to have world title gold again. We might mention that he beat The Undertaker three times on PPVs in 2010, too. Can't go higher than an "A," right?

GRADE: A+

MARKETABILITY: After 12 years, there isn't much WWE can do to market Kane any further than it already has as a scary, demonic, pyromaniacal madman. Somehow it injected new life (and near-death) into Chapter 813 of his feud with Undertaker, however. What, you expect the company to exploit his libertarian political views somehow? After all this time, WWE doesn't need him to be too marketable.

GRADE: C

Photo by George Napolitano

REPERTOIRE: Kane is like an elite MLB closer who can hit 100 miles-per-hour consistently on a radar gun. He might try to trick you with an occasional off-speed pitch, but most of the time, he might as well tell you the fastball is coming. If you can hit it hard somewhere, more power to you. Kane's opponents need not spend hours studying footage of him. They know what's coming, and it won't be borrowed from Evan Bourne's arsenal. Power, power, and a little more power—big boots, choke-slams, and maybe a Tombstone piledriver. Kane did all that with the kind of fury we haven't seen from him in years. It mostly worked.

GRADE: B

CAREER GROWTH: We didn't know he had it in him. We pegged him as a solid mid-carder for the rest of his days in WWE. There's a reason he was in the MITB ladder match for the second straight WrestleMania in 2010. WWE wants to feature him on the year's biggest show, but he hadn't had a hot enough feud to warrant a singles match. So he filled out the MITB docket. It looked like he was doing the same thing at the MITB pay-per-view, but then he went and won the thing and enjoyed a five-month World title reign.

GRADE: A

OVERALL VALUE: The desire to excel clearly still burns within him. As unexpected as it was, 2010 was a career year for him. He won't likely duplicate it, but then again, at this time last year, we thought 1998 had been his career year.

GRADE: A

Photo by Stu Saks

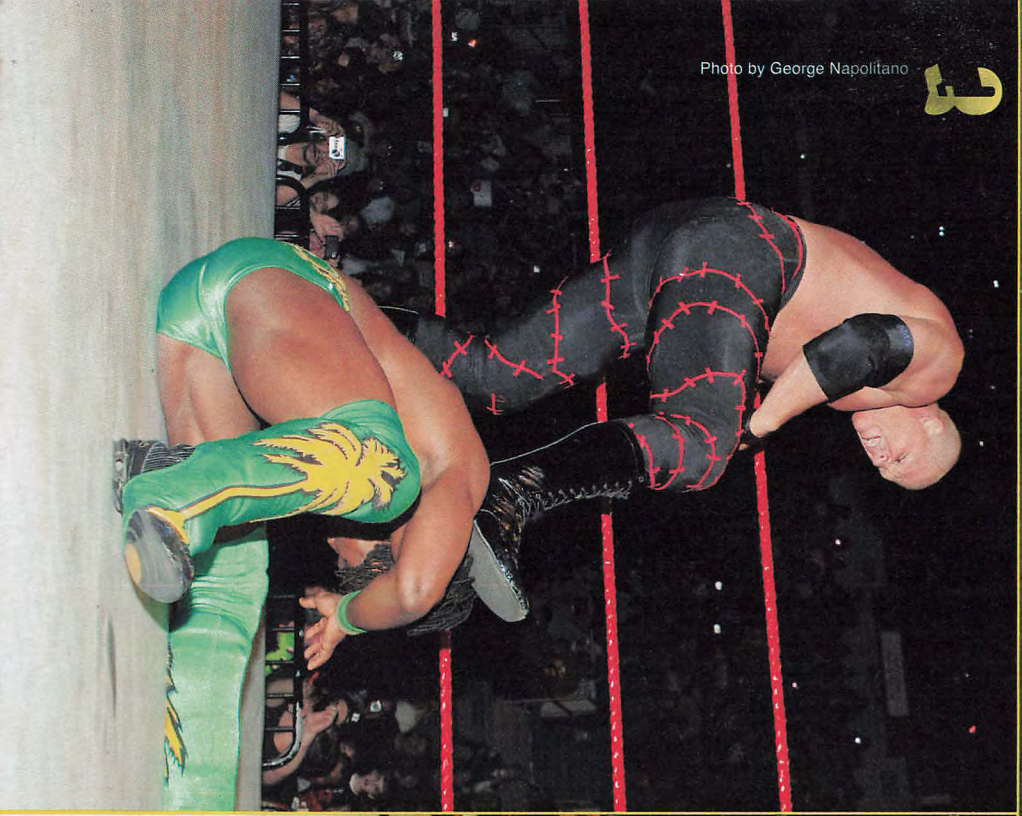
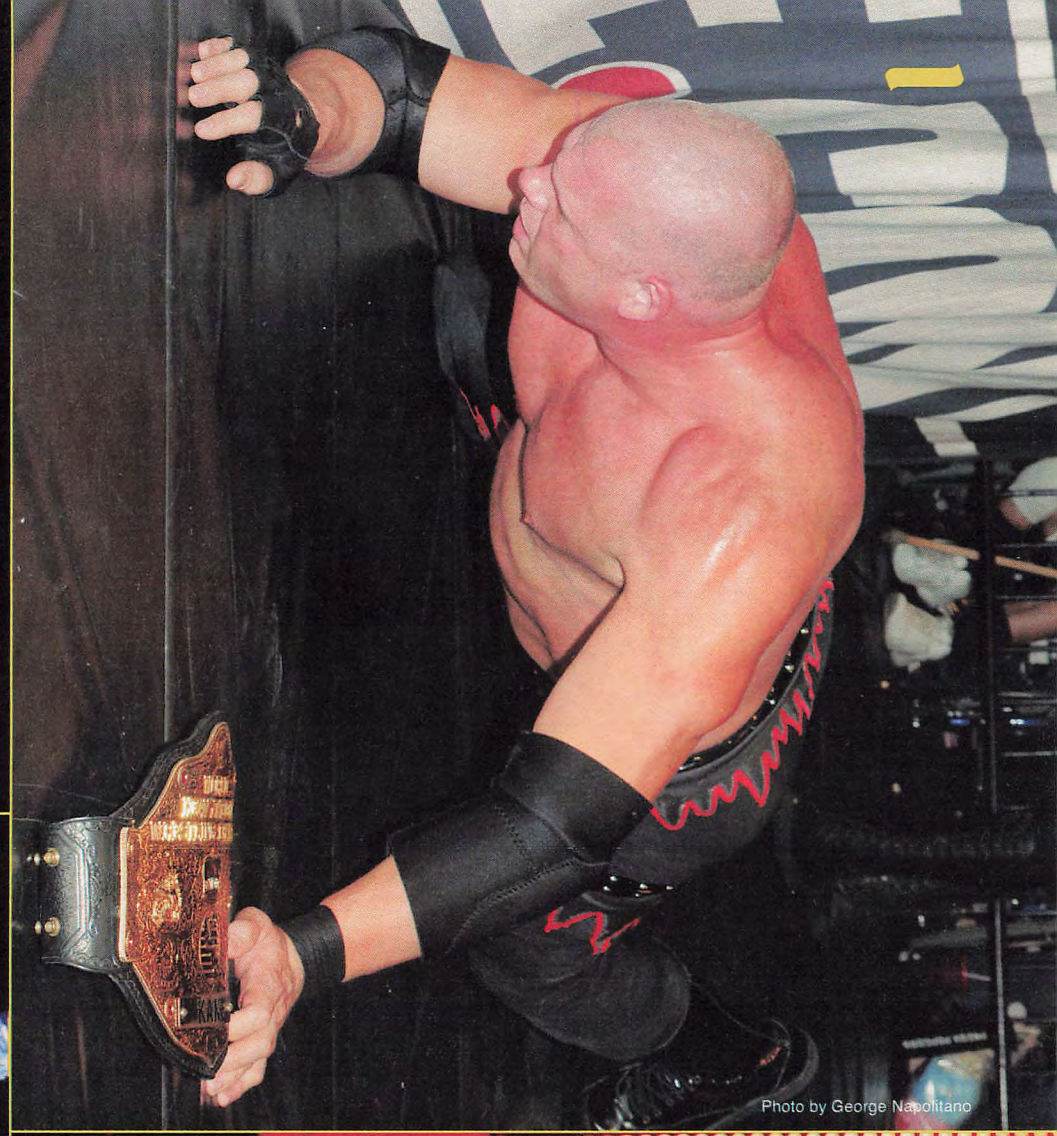


Photo by George Napolitano
3

Photo by George Napolitano
4


1
Photo by George Napolitano

2

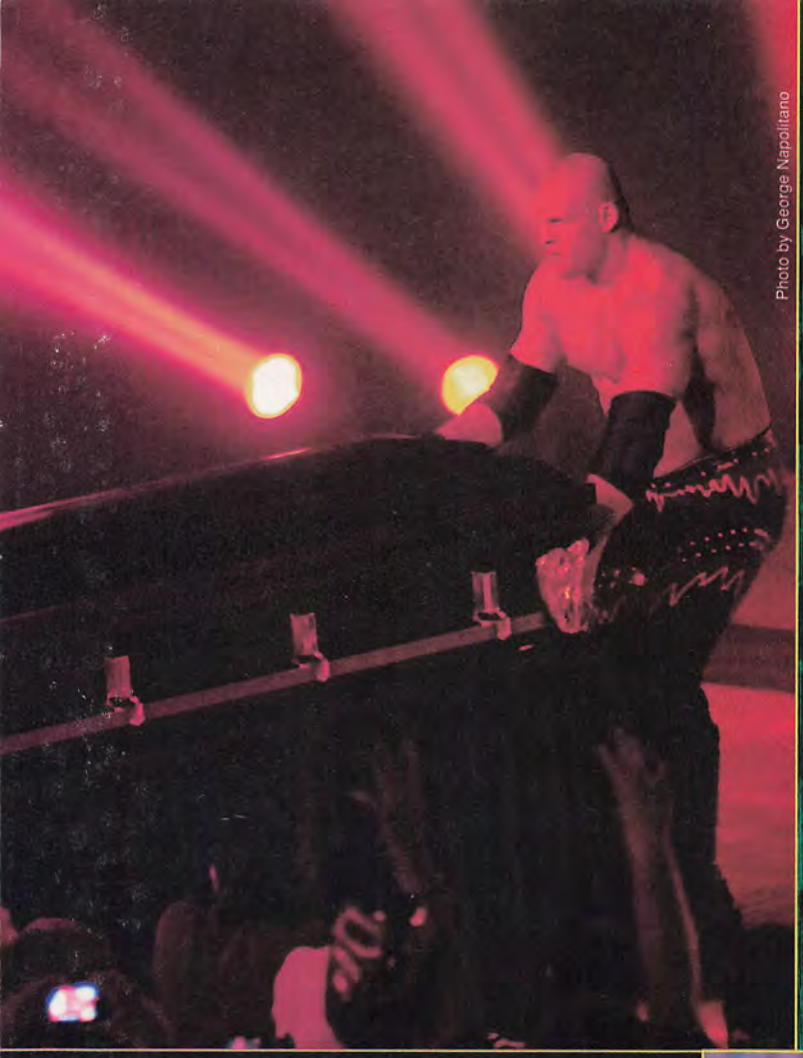


Photo by George Napolitano

KANE

1 2 3 4 5

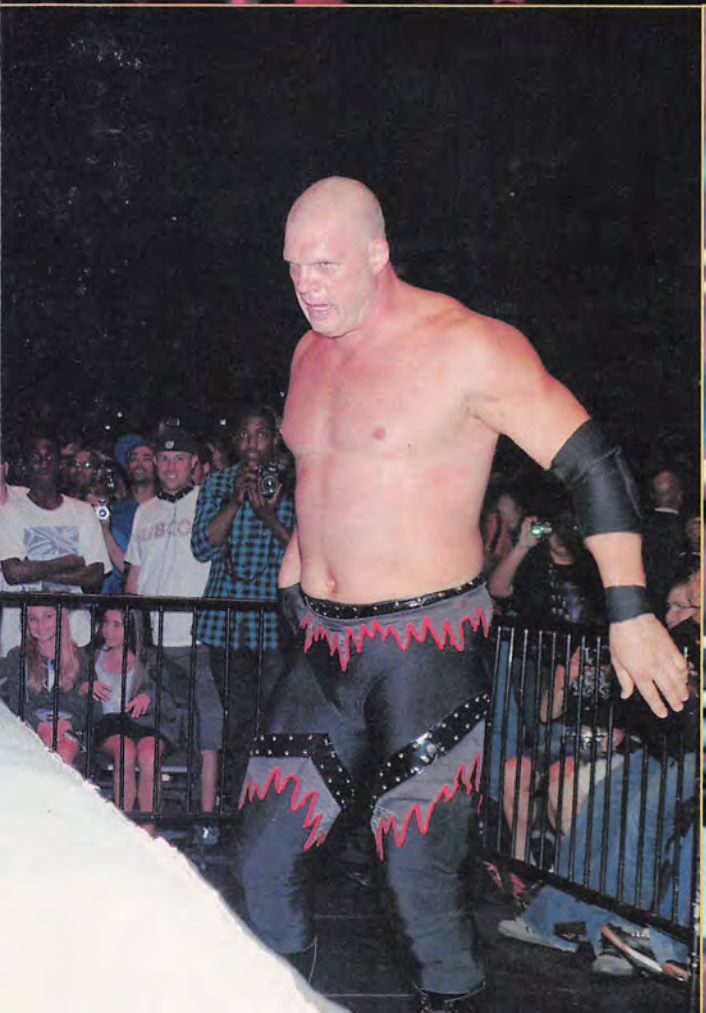
If Kane did nothing else over the past year, he proved that he is indeed championship material by defeating Rey Mysterio Jr. to win in second WWE World title.

Kane's sense of the macabre may not please all the fans, but it certainly gets their attention. WWE has been wise to market "The Big Red Machine" as the demented pyromaniac he is.

Kane offers little more than kicks, punches, stomps, and slams, but who can stop him once he gets going? Even the agility and athleticism of Kofi Kingston doesn't match up.

Kane enjoyed tremendous success against The Undertaker in 2010, defeating his big brother three times on pay-per-view.

As a veteran presence in WWE, Kane can help younger wrestlers such as Dolph Ziggler make their names ... assuming they survive his chokeslam.



CM PUNK

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: The Straight Edge Society didn't work out, so CM Punk traded up and took the helm of The New Nexus. As the leader of Nexus, Punk has been masterful. He's an evil genius who has ruled through fear and intimidation. Punk has positioned himself as one of the top heels on the Raw brand, and has scored big wins over John Cena and Randy Orton. As long as he can keep Nexus in check, there is a very good chance that he will capture the WWE championship in the near future. At the very least, he should be in the thick of title contention.

GRADE: B+

MARKETABILITY: Punk is one of wrestling's best talkers. But instead of using that talent to win over the fans, he takes perverse pleasure in making himself hated. Roddy Piper used to be known as "the man you love to hate." Punk fills that role today. Even as a vicious rulebreaker, Punk maintains a passionate cult following, and even the fans who hate him have to respect him. And many of those fans buy everything from T-shirts to iPad skins.

GRADE: B

Photo by George Napolitano

REPERTOIRE: Punk calls upon many different influences with his in-ring style. He studies international videotapes in search of new moves (his Go To Sleep finisher was lifted from KENTA, for example). He uses a variety of martial arts kicks and Muy Thai knee attacks, coupled with excellent pro wrestling fundamentals. Every once in a while, Punk will bring out his Anaconda Vice or Kokina Clutch, moves that are extremely difficult to counter or escape. His biggest weakness is his lack of upper body strength, but he offsets that with superior cardiovascular conditioning and a smart ring style that avoids direct tests of strength.

GRADE: A-

CAREER GROWTH: About a year ago, Punk was feuding with Rey Mysterio Jr. and The Big Show on Smackdown and preaching about a Straight Edge lifestyle. Today, he's feuding with Randy Orton and leads the most powerful faction on Raw. He has taken a major step forward. Punk is hitting his stride. He is living up to his potential and making his mark as the most unique and captivating wrestler on the Raw brand today. It's hard to believe that just a few months ago he was sitting at the announcers' table.

GRADE: A+

OVERALL VALUE: Punk is a rarity: a world-class wrestler who is also brilliant on the microphone. He may not be the most popular wrestler on the WWE roster, but he makes an ideal foil for the likes of Cena, Orton, and Triple-H. The great heroes always need a top-rate villain, and Punk certainly fits that bill. He has personality and the wrestling ability to compete against any opponent. He has the ability to succeed Shawn Michaels as WWE's resident show-stopper, provided he doesn't grow too reliant on his Nexus flunkies. Punk revealed how knowledgeable he is during his time as the *Raw* analyst and that insight into the sport reveals itself in the ring daily.

GRADE: A

Photo by Wayne McCarty
AMA
RVCA

©2011 World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc. All Rights Reserved

Photo by Wayne McCarty

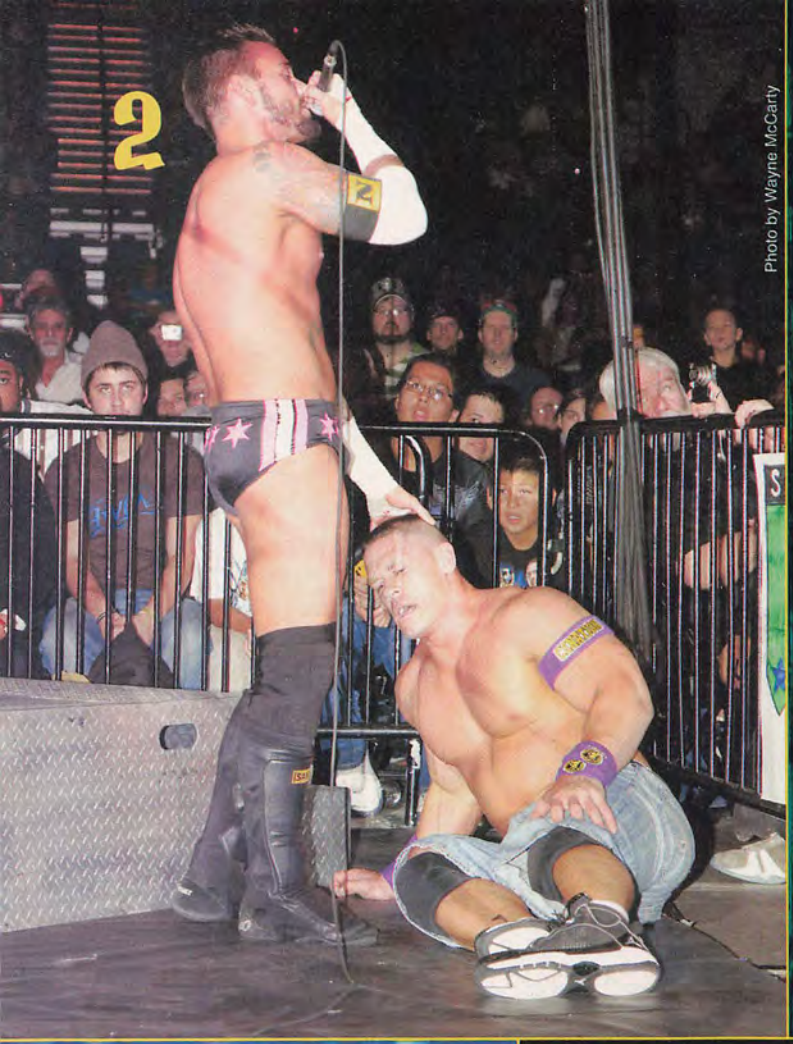


Photo by Wayne McCarty

CM PUNK

1 2 3 4 5

CM and his merry men exult after issuing a beat-down to Randy Orton. Punk fancies himself a leader of men, but it remains to be seen how long he can corral the ambitious members of Nexus.

Punk is so darned cocky that he'll address the crowd right in the middle of a match with one of the most dangerous men in the game, Cena.

If Punk finds himself in trouble, he can count on the help of The New Nexus. For now at least. Michael McGillicutty (left) and Mason Ryan are only too happy to assist their leader.

Knowing that he can't match strength with The Big Show, Punk is smart enough to know how to level the playing field. Truthfully, Punk's lack of size has never been an impediment to his success.

Punk hits John Cena with a rapid succession of knees to the chest. It's very difficult to prepare for Punk, whose attack comes from all angles.

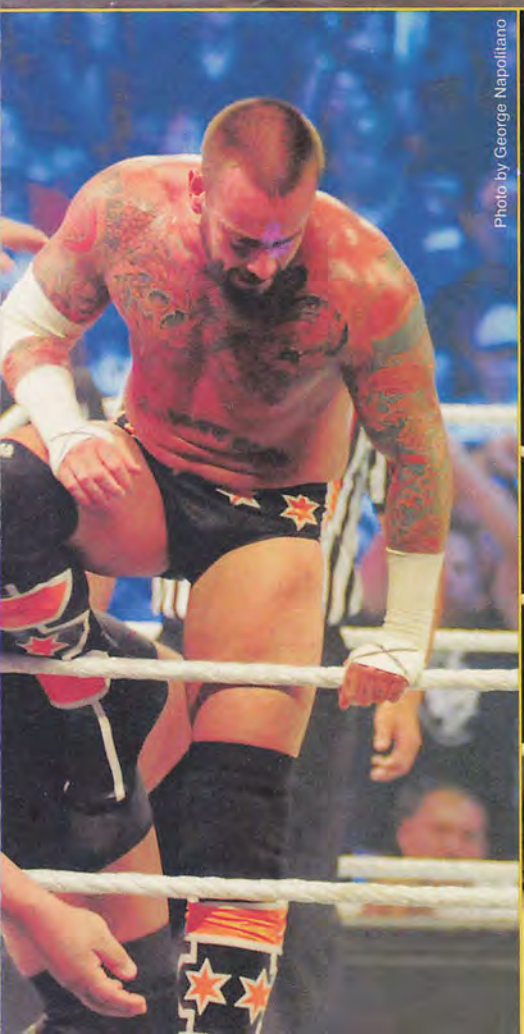


Photo by George Napolitano

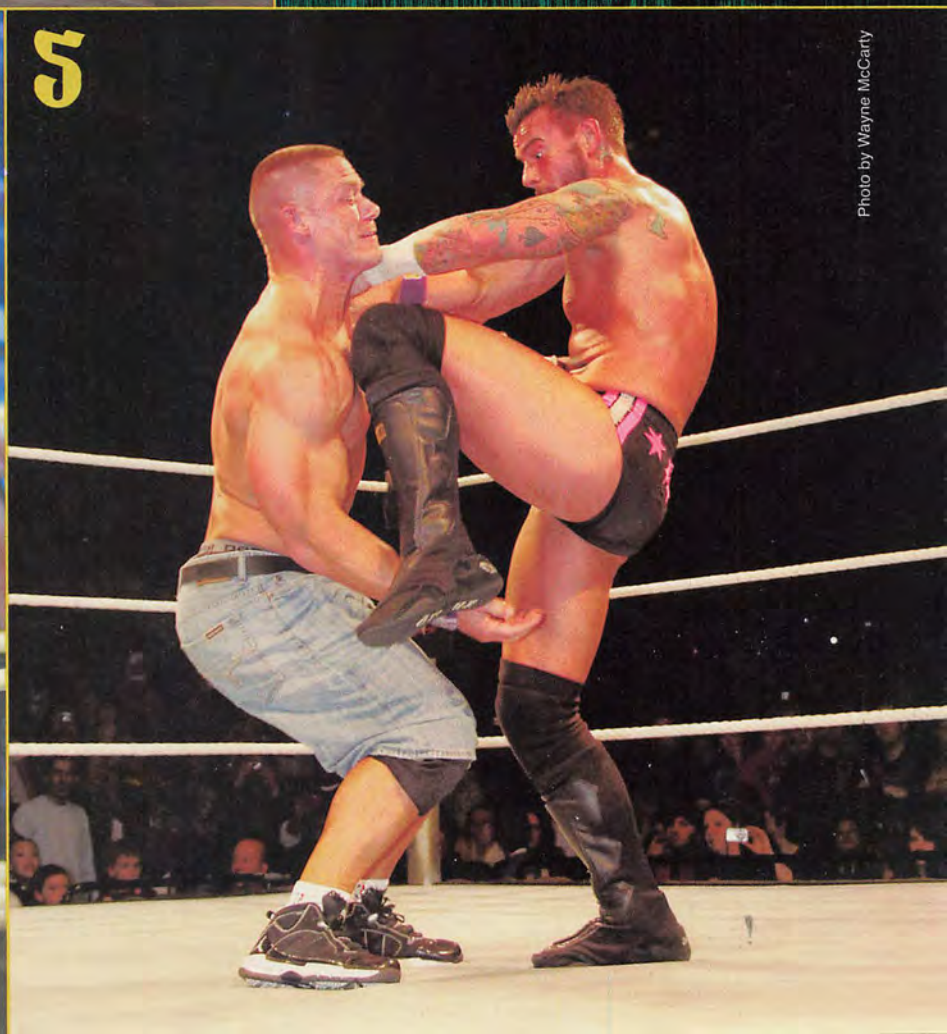


Photo by Wayne McCarty

RODERICK STRONG

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: After eight years in Ring of Honor, Strong achieved the loftiest of all wrestlers' goals in the company by defeating Tyler Black to win the heavyweight championship in September. In doing so, Strong put to rest any doubts about whether he has what it takes to be a top star in ROH. Although it's unquestionably been the greatest year of Strong's career, he did come up short in his apparent objective to graduate from ROH to a bigger promotion. He got a tryout match in TNA in August, but was not hired.

GRADE: A

MARKETABILITY: Although his name might suggest otherwise, Strong is hardly built like an Adonis. At 5'10", 212 pounds, he simply does not have a major-league look, even by the standards of ROH, which has not been shy about pushing undersized wrestlers. You'd hope what Strong lacks in stature he could make up for in speaking ability, but the reigning ROH champ is only so-so on the mike. That's why he hired the loquacious Truth Martini as a manager.

GRADE: C

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

REPERTOIRE: Here's where Strong shines. His unassuming ring presence belies one of the most aggressive and punishing arsenals in the sport. When he is on his A-game, Strong can be relentless in his assault, which includes his CX '02 crucifix cutter, CX '03 Gory neckbreaker, and his Death By Roderick fireman's carry double-knee gutbuster. He's also earned the moniker "The Master Of The Backbreaker" because of his myriad variations of the move. What's more, he can deliver them all with unbelievable speed.

GRADE: A+

CAREER GROWTH: Strong made strides last year in transforming himself from an opening-match competitor into a legitimate main-event star. Some naysayers may wonder if Strong would have made it to the top of the company were it not for the fact that the pool of top-tier talent in ROH shrunk considerably with the departures of Tyler Black and Austin Aries. The truth is, Strong earned his spot at the top of the cards with his hard work and consistently solid performances. And since winning the title, he's successfully defended it against the best ROH has to offer, including Christopher Daniels, Homicide, and Davey Richards.

GRADE: A

OVERALL VALUE: In as much as Ring of Honor puts a premium on quality wrestling, Strong is an ideal champion for the company. He may not have the flashiest looks or deliver the most compelling promos, but, from bell to bell, Strong consistently delivers in the ring. As much as ROH wishes its talent the best opportunities, Strong's inability to land a job in TNA had to come as a relief to owner Cary Silkin.

GRADE: A

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

1

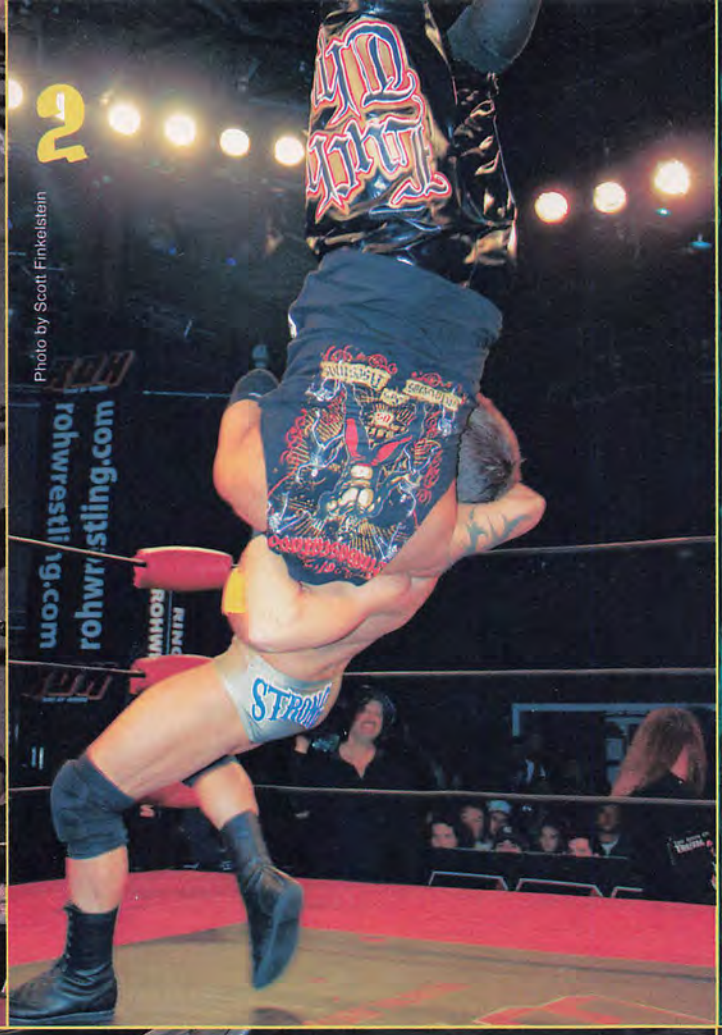
Photo by George Napolitano

3

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

4

Photo by Scott Finkelstein



RODERICK STRONG

1 2 3 4 5

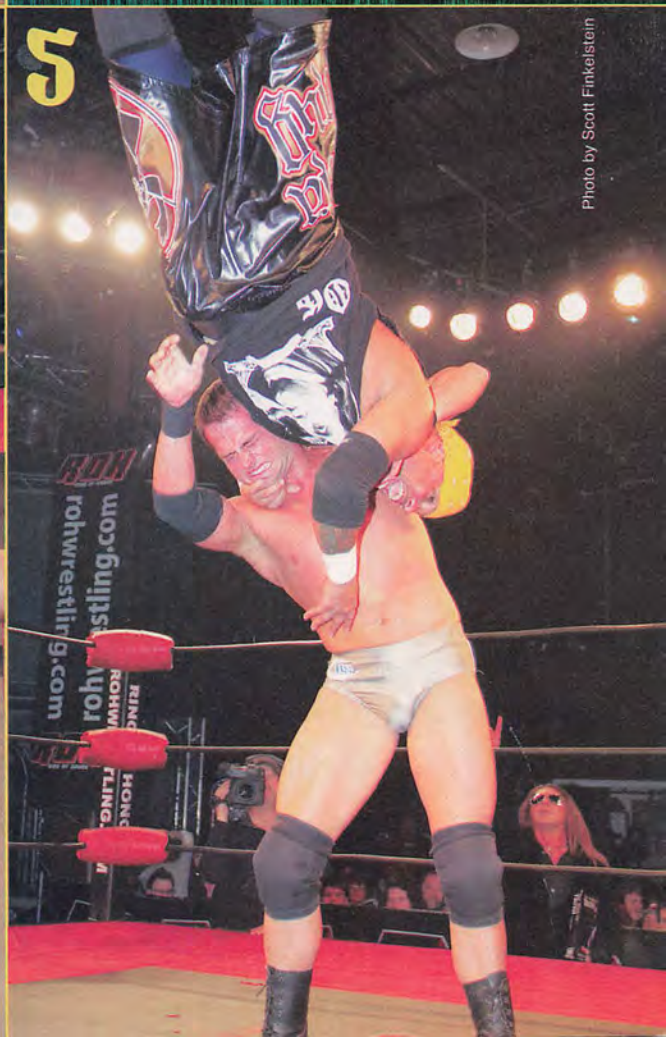
When it was learned that Tyler Black had accepted WWE's offer to go to its developmental territory, FCW, it was expected that he would drop the ROH title. Strong, he of the Sick-Kick, got the job done.

Fresh off a four-year run in TNA, Homicide may have thought the ROH heavyweight title was easy pickings. Strong convinced him otherwise.

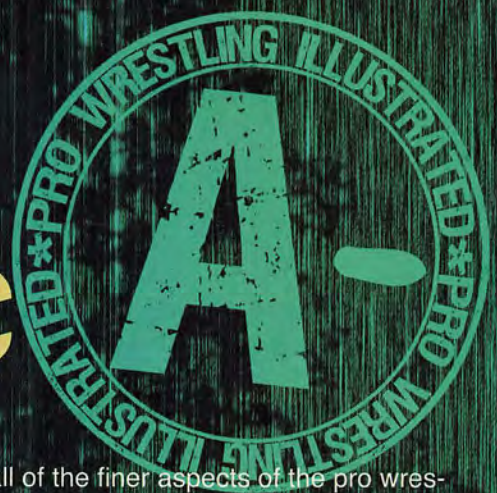
Strong would rather concentrate on wrestling men like Jay Briscoe and leave the bulk of the talking to his manager, Truth Martini (observing from ringside).

Former champ Austin Aries gave Strong some of his stiffest challenges. Aries is gone, but there are plenty of formidable challengers remaining, and, to his credit, Rod has ducked no one.

There is no way for a wrestler, even a veteran like Homicide, to prepare for a wrestler who has so many finishing moves in his arsenal. Strong may not be the wrestler TNA was looking for, but he's a formidable, if underrated, superstar.



KURT ANGLE



GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: The past year has been a trying time for Kurt Angle. The Hogan/Bischoff regime has kept him blackballed from the title picture, while Jeff Jarrett has taken pride in airing all of his dirty laundry in public. Angle has managed to persevere, though. Even when it looked as though he might be mulling retirement, Angle has bounced back to show he still has a claim to being the world's best wrestler. Feuds with Immortal, Jarrett, and Mr. Anderson have yielded both highs and lows, but none of them have brought him closer to the TNA World championship that he truly covets.

GRADE: C+

MARKETABILITY: Angle is an Olympic champion with marquee credentials. He was one of wrestling's biggest stars of the 2000s, an incredible speaker, and arguably the best all-around wrestler ever. There's no debating it, Angle has incredible drawing power.

GRADE: A+

REPERTOIRE: Olympic gold medalist. Need we say more? Obviously, Angle is an exceptionally gifted freestyle wrestler and submission artist, but he also picked up on all of the finer aspects of the pro wrestling game. He can brawl, he can cheat, he can wrestle, he can execute incredibly risky aerial maneuvers when inspired. Angle can do it all.

GRADE: A+

CAREER GROWTH: At the start of 2010, Angle was competing with AJ Styles for the TNA World title. Today, Angle is competing with Jarrett over a marriage. Angle has always been an elite wrestler, but petty feuds often distract him. He allows people like Jarrett and Mr. Anderson to manipulate him and lead him into go-nowhere feuds. Angle may have won his summer 2010 feud with Anderson, but Mr. Anderson went on to hold the TNA World title (albeit briefly) while Angle stagnated in feuds with Jarrett and Immortal. That's not growth.

GRADE: C

OVERALL VALUE: Angle is a unique case. At any moment, he can be inserted into the main-event picture and instantly become a credible World champion and PPV draw. He can also excel on the mid-card level. He can thrive as a fan favorite or a heel. He is equally adept at comedy as he is at intensity. In short, Angle can do just about anything. He is an invaluable resource that any promotion would be proud to have on its roster. A victory over Kurt Angle can make a wrestler's career overnight, and there are very few wrestlers who have that kind of cache these days. On the flip side, Angle has had more than his share of injuries through the years. TNA's reduced schedule has helped him avoid burnout and heal some nagging injuries, but the broken necks and years of bumps have taken a toll. Angle is still a fantastic wrestler, but he is a step slower than he was five years ago. Still, even at 75 percent, Angle would be better than 95 percent of most active wrestlers. TNA is a better promotion for having Angle on its roster.

GRADE: A-

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

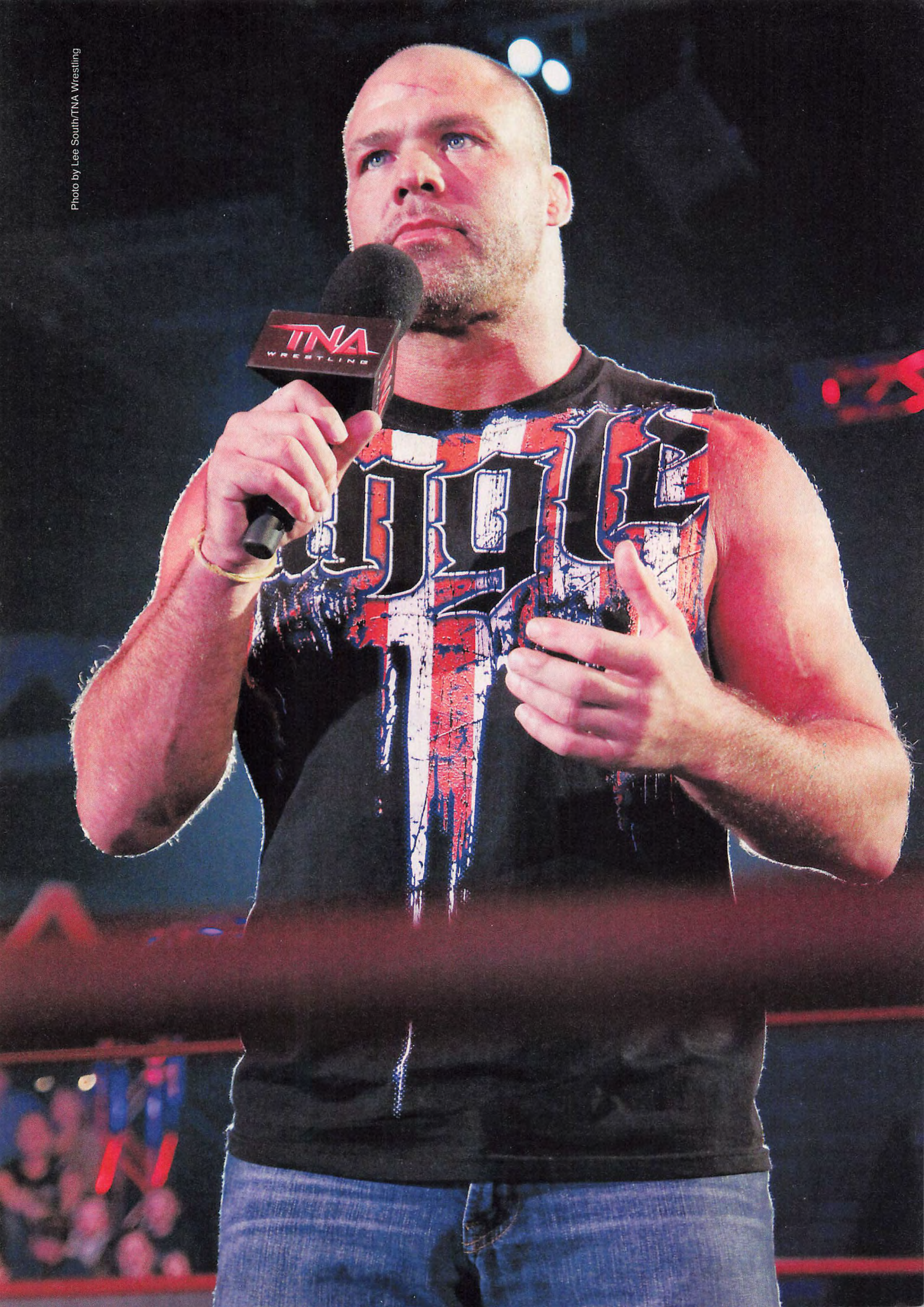
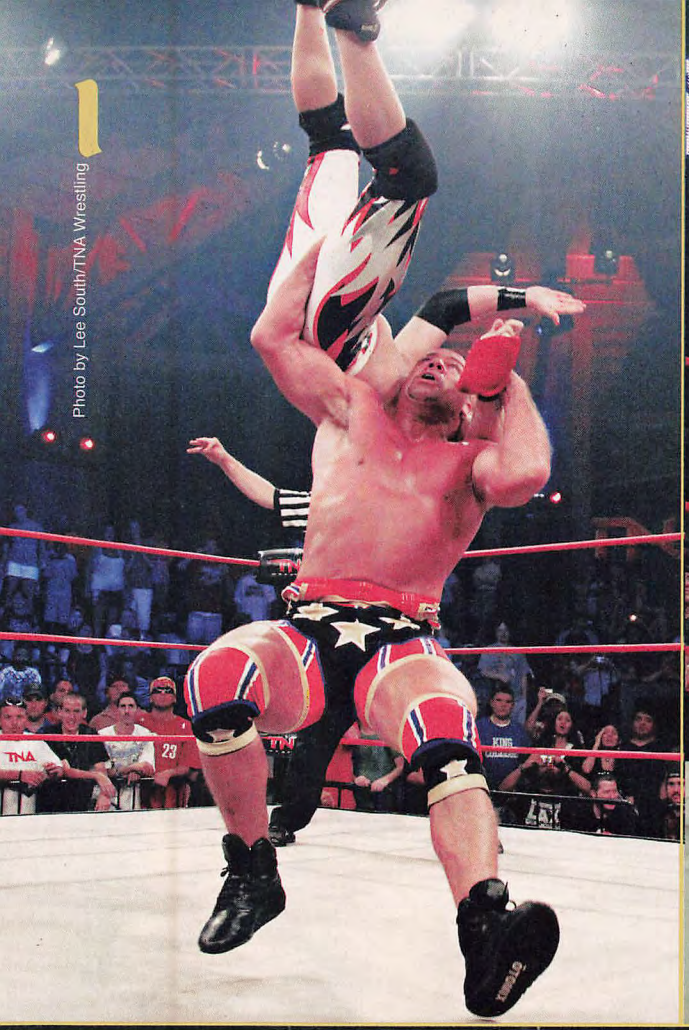


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling


1
Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

2
LING.COM

3
Photo by George Tahinos/TNA Wrestling

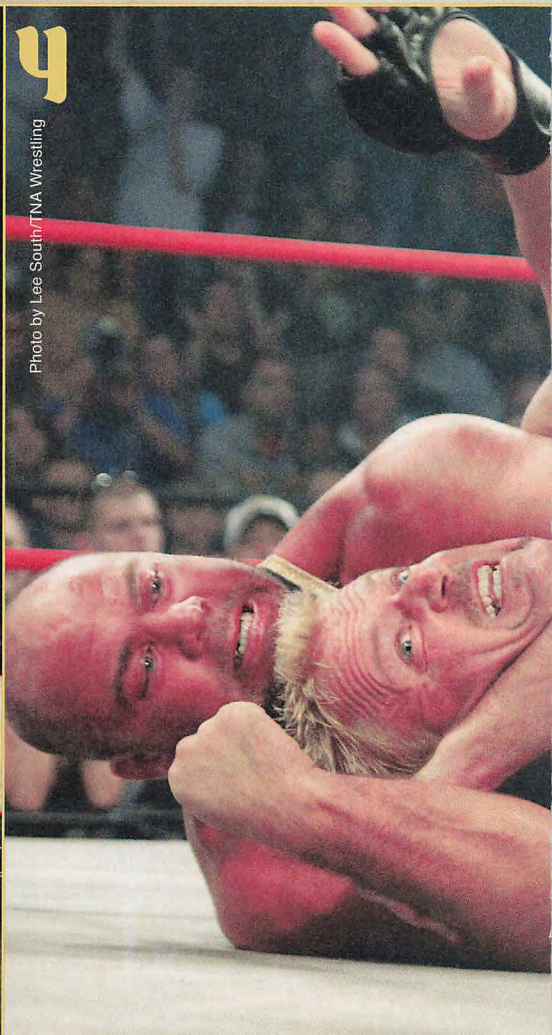

4
Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

KURT ANGLE

1 2 3 4 5

When Angle can focus on wrestling, there isn't a more versatile competitor. He's as effective against super heavyweights as he is speedsters like Amazing Red.

The referee is the only thing standing between Jeff Jarrett and a concussion. Few wrestlers have ever been able to dial up Angle's anger like Jeff has during the past year.

Let's see, we'll not only have Jarrett and Karen renew their wedding vows, but we'll force Angle to walk his ex-wife down the aisle beforehand. Talk about a powder keg!

There is not a wrestler in the game today, including Jarrett, who stands a chance against Angle in an MMA contest. Had Kurt come along a few years later, his employer might well have been Dana White.

When Jeff Hardy flies, he prefers to be the pilot. Angle sends the former TNA World champion in for a crash landing at the Impact Zone.

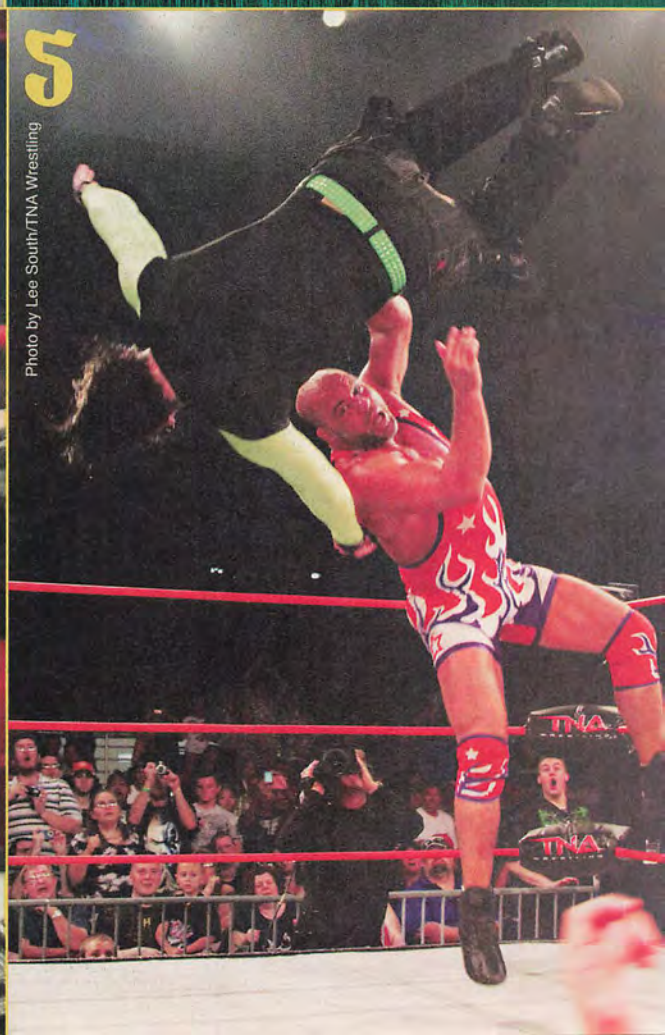
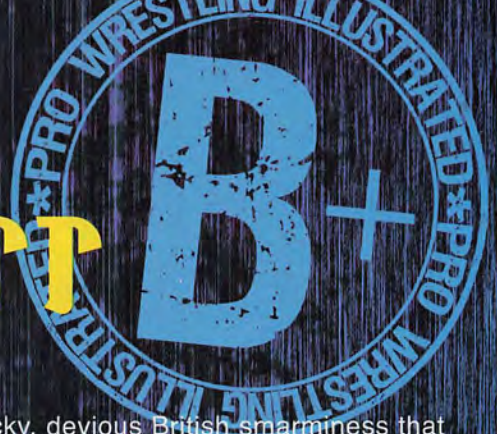


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

WADE BARRETT



GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Did you know who Wade Barrett was 365 days ago? Maybe you knew he was "one of those *NXT* guys … the British one, I think." It wasn't until June 1 that he won *NXT* Season One. Only then did he make some (very loud) noise. His main goal for 2010 when the year began had to have been to earn a regular mid-card spot on the WWE roster after having excelled in FCW. Anything beyond that was a bonus. That bonus ended up consisting of winning Season One of *NXT*, earning a prominent spot on the Raw roster, forming maybe the hottest supergroup since the heyday of the NWO, provoking a white-hot feud with John Cena, forcing Cena to join his group (The Nexus) against his will, knocking Cena out of WWE temporarily, and twice wrestling for the WWE title on PPV. Those are just the highlights. Bloody overachiever!

GRADE: A+

MARKETABILITY: WWE made a concerted effort to build new stars in 2010, and at only 30 years old, Barrett is poised to be one of the leaders of this next generation. He was far and away the standout star of the original Nexus, and he did a lot to make simple black-and-yellow T-shirts cool and very recognizable. That cocky, devious British smarminess that he exudes works incredibly well for him.

GRADE: B

REPERTOIRE: This is one area in which Barrett needs improvement. But that's true of most young WWE stars. In past generations, younger wrestlers could bounce from territory to territory to hone their skills before trying to make it in one of the big promotions. Nowadays, wrestlers tend to be rushed through the WWE developmental system and onto the main roster. For many like Barrett, the personae develop faster than the ring skills. His "Wasteland" finisher is solid, and he uses his skills as a former boxer well, but he's somewhat predictable.

GRADE: C

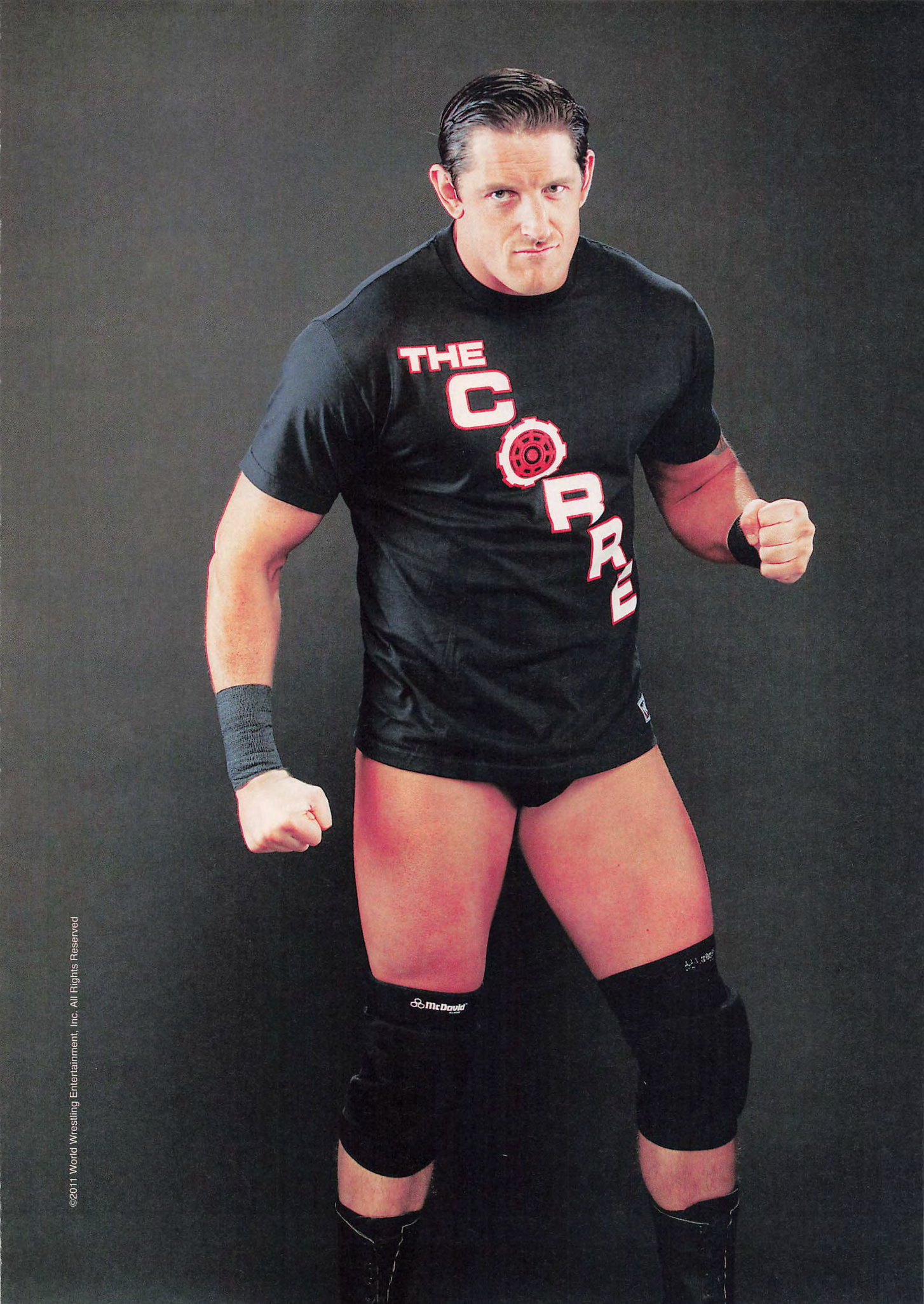
CAREER GROWTH: Look at it this way: He might need to win the World or WWE championship in 2011 if his career is to grow significantly this year. Without capturing a single championship, he somehow managed to take huge strides in 2010.

GRADE: B+

Photo by George Napolitano

OVERALL VALUE: As mentioned, we barely knew who he was when 2010 got under way, but WWE would not have been nearly as strong had he not been around. For Nexus to be such a dynamic force, it needed to count as members only the young newcomers from the first season of *NXT*. The group works with CM Punk as leader now, but someone like Barrett needed to be the leader first to make it special. Really, it needed to be Barrett and not just any other guy from *NXT's* first season. He has an odd charisma that makes him a natural but scary leader.

GRADE: B+



©2011 World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc. All Rights Reserved

Photo by Stu Saks

Photo by George Napolitano

©2011 World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc. All Rights Reserved

©2010 World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc. All Rights Reserved

WADE BARRETT

1 2 3 4 5

It wasn't as if Justin Gabriel and Heath Slater were loyal to Barrett—they, too, were tossed from the Nexus faction by CM Punk. The Corre is now Smackdown's problem.

Ironically, the only person who lasted longer than Barrett at The Royal Rumble was Punk, 35:21-22:33. Here, Barrett drives a knee into the head of Rey Mysterio Jr.

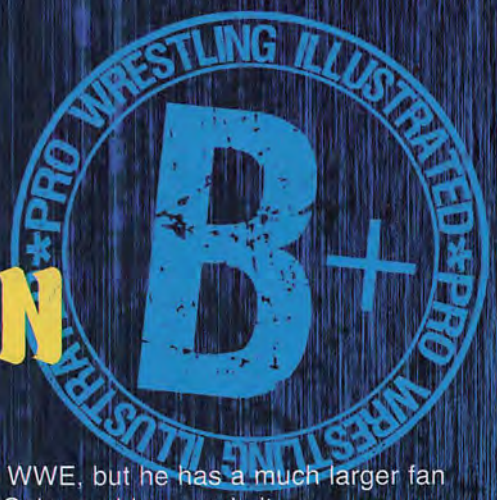
The former bareknuckle boxer puts the leather to The Big Show. Barrett is slowly proving that there is more to his game than just his bravado.

Seeing a 6'5", 260-pounder descending upon him from the top turnbuckle is not a pleasant sight for R-Truth. The truth about Barrett is that he enjoys inflicting punishment.

Barrett puts his long legs to use as he plants a boot under Drew McIntyre's chin and uses the top rope to enhance the pressure.

Photo by Stu Saks

DANIEL BRYAN



GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Daniel Bryan isn't the conventional WWE superstar. He's a little too small, a little too pale, and a little too bland. But Bryan managed to become the breakout star of *NXT* Season One. Getting fired from WWE for his violent attack on ring announcer Justin Roberts turned out to be a blessing in disguise, and Bryan went back to the independent scene and generated more "buzz" as wrestling's top free agent. He made a stunning surprise return in the main event of SummerSlam, went on to beat The Miz for the U.S. title, and has somehow become WWE's hottest bachelor. That's a pretty incredible year by any standards.

GRADE: A

MARKETABILITY: Michael Cole loves to rip on Bryan for being a "nerd" or for being too bland to be a WWE superstar. Bryan may not be overly flashy, and he may not be wrestling's best promo man, but he has credibility as one of the world's finest wrestlers. He has a core audience who followed him in Ring of Honor and on the indy circuit and continues to support him today. He may not be the most marketable star in WWE, but he has a much larger fan following than Cole would ever admit.

GRADE: C

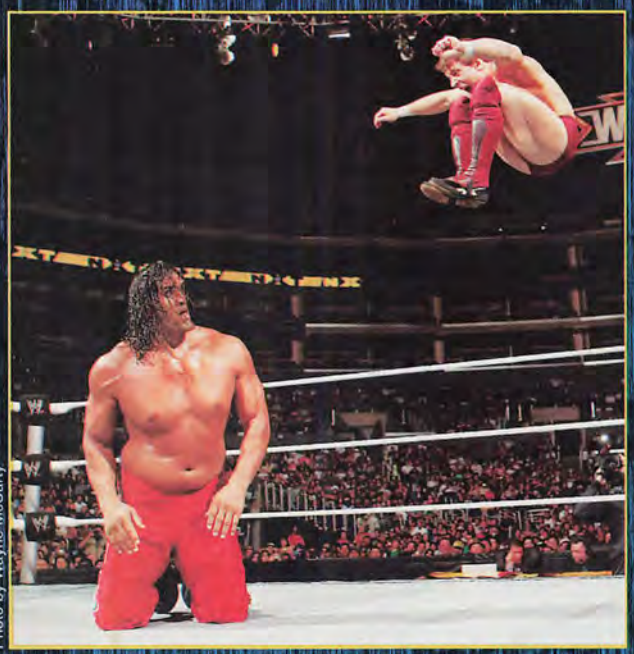


Photo by Wayne McCarty

REPERTOIRE: Bryan has a well-earned reputation as being one of the finest submission grapplers in the game. He also has a daredevil streak and an affinity for high-risk suicide dives to the floor. Bryan used to try to use a different submission hold to win each of his matches, just to keep himself fresh. These days, he's concentrating almost exclusively on the LeBell lock, but he has much more in his arsenal that he can call upon when pushed. However, Bryan's one weakness is mobility and foot speed. He frequently gets caught with a big punch that changes the momentum of the match, especially against larger opponents like Sheamus. Bryan is most effective at close range when he can secure his submissions. Unless he can learn to avoid big punches in close quarters, he is going to struggle against more powerful opponents.

GRADE: A

CAREER GROWTH: Winning, and defending, the U.S. title has been an impressive accomplishment. Bryan has been the Cinderella story of 2010. It remains to be seen whether he can continue that momentum over the coming months. Much of Bryan's initial success in WWE was due to the element of surprise–wrestlers like Chris Jericho, The Miz, and Dolph Ziggler underestimated him. No one is underestimating Bryan anymore.

GRADE: A

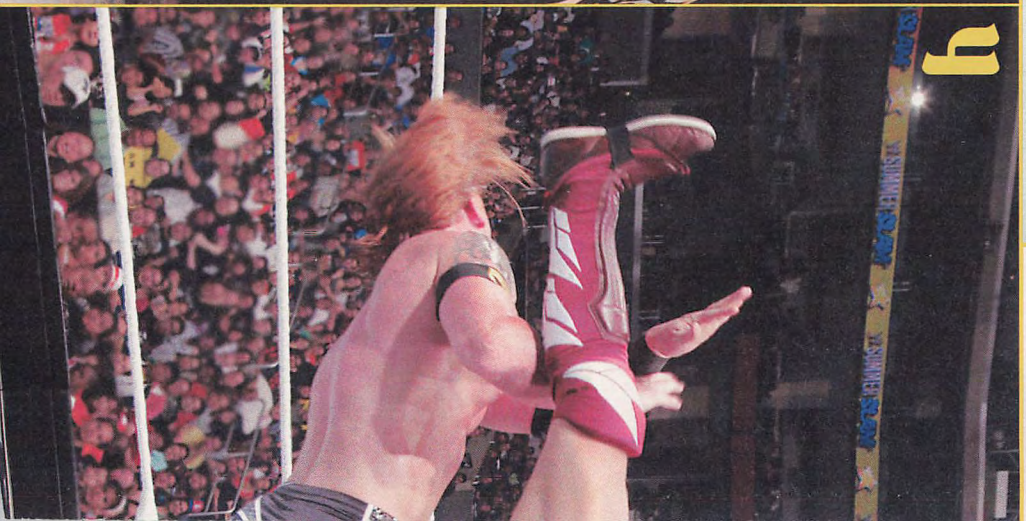
OVERALL VALUE: Bryan has made a great feel-good story, but his overall value to WWE has yet to be established. Can a no-frills grappler really make it to the main-event level in WWE? Bryan's wrestling credentials are unquestioned, but it takes more than pure wrestling ability to survive in WWE long-term. He needs to show a bit more intensity and prove himself against main-event level competition to convince fans that he is more than a novelty act.

GRADE: B+

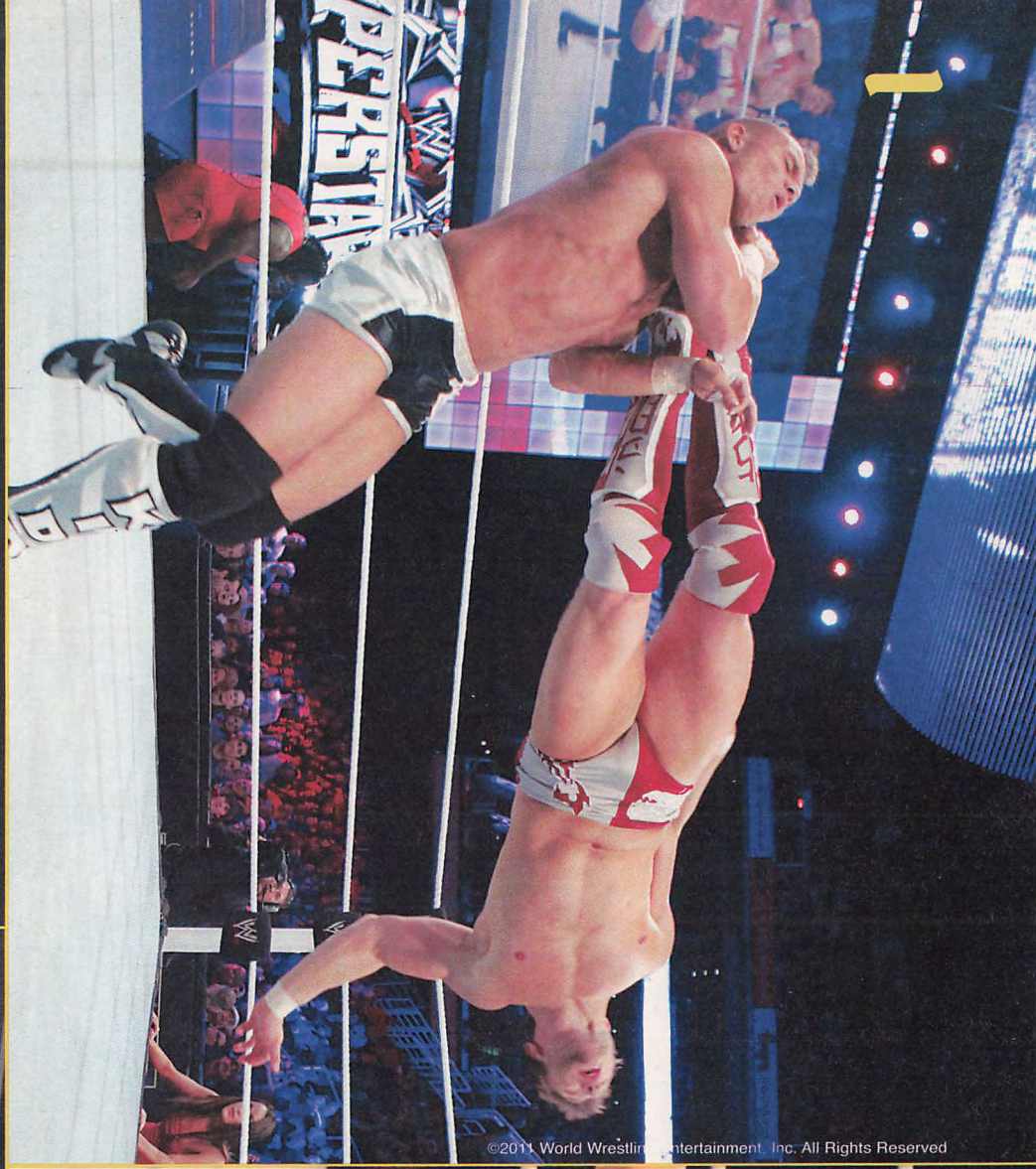
Photo by Wayne McCarty

3

Photo by George Napolitano



4



1

©2011 World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc. All Rights Reserved

Photo by Wayne McCarty

2

DANIEL BRYAN

1 2 3 4 5

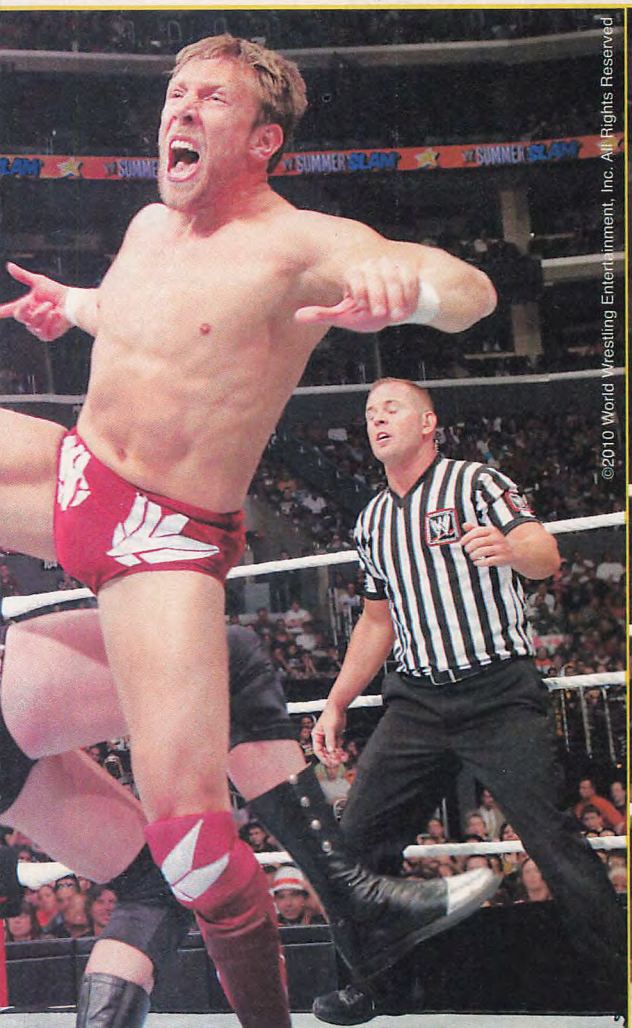
Bryan's vertical leap is not noteworthy, but the accuracy of his dropkicks is. There is never a wasted move in his attack, and each one seems to perfectly set up the next.

Bryan seems to take delight in the fact that he has far too many holds at his disposal for his opponents—particularly young ones like Ted DiBiase Jr.—to learn counters for. The LeBell Lock is a particular favorite these days.

Justin Gabriel should not feel badly about submitting to Bryan's surfboard. Few who find themselves in this predicament are able to get out. We're not sure if Bryan ever got careless and let his shoulders down while applying it.

Among Bryan's many positive attributes is his uncanny peripheral vision, displayed here as he nails a charging Heath Slater with a kick to the face.

DiBiase charges Bryan in the corner, but, lo and behold, he's found an escape route. Whatever Bryan may lack in foot speed, he makes up for with his quickness and instincts.



©2010 World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc. All Rights Reserved

5

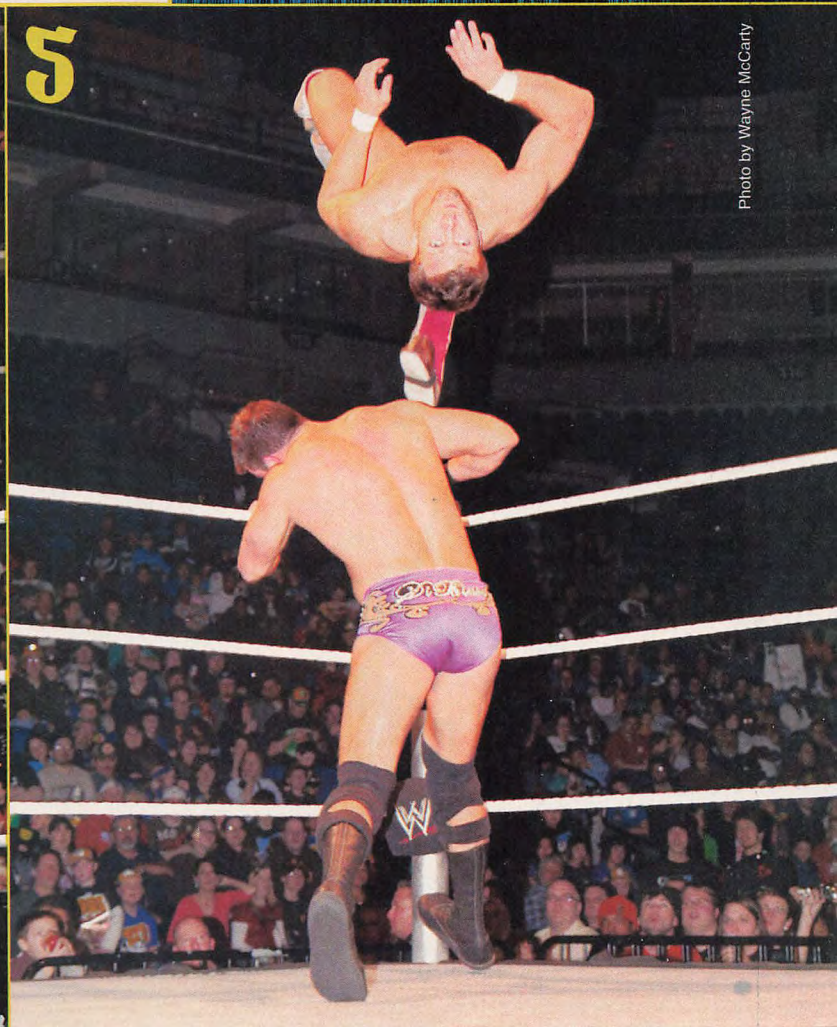
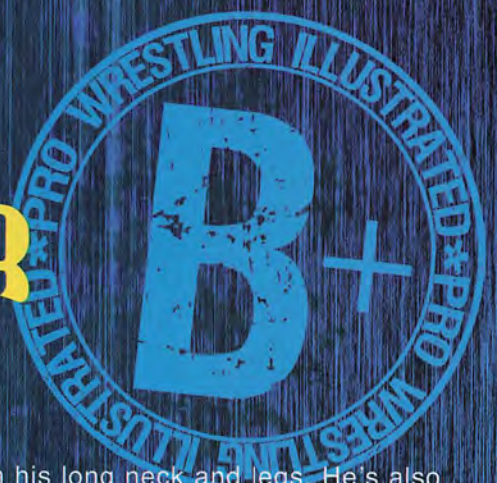


Photo by Wayne McCarty

CHRISTOPHER DANIELS



GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: After taking a steep fall from grace that saw him go from headlining successive pay-per-views for TNA to getting fired, Daniels worked hard until finally climbing back to championship gold. He returned to ROH in April of last year, and almost immediately set his sights on Eddie Edwards' TV championship. Despite some setbacks, Daniels continued on his quest until finally defeating Edwards for the title in December. Not only did Daniels successfully retain the title in a 2-out-of-3 falls rematch against Edwards in February, but he also earned a heavyweight title shot in April. What's more, around press time, TNA had brought Daniels back to reprise the Suicide character.

GRADE: A

MARKETABILITY: The ambiguous "Fallen Angel" character has never exactly been a gold mine—a fact that may have led to TNA originally parting ways with the otherwise talented Daniels. The Los Angeles native does his best to get the gimmick over with his brooding looks and intense interview style, but it still reeks of minor league indy wrestling. It doesn't help that Daniels has a peculiar physique, with his long neck and legs. He's also just turned 40 years old, and is starting to look it.

GRADE: B-

REPERTOIRE: Daniels' innovative signature moves could fill up most of the allotted space for this category. A pioneer of high-flying, cruiserweight-style wrestling, Daniels has never become complacent with his move set, and has instead continuously expanded his repertoire of unique and dazzling moves. They include his 90-degree spinning, lifting, sit-out double-underhook facebuster, called the Angel's Wings, and his aptly named Best Moonsault Ever.

GRADE: A+

CAREER GROWTH: The past year of Daniels' career seems impressive enough. He climbed through the ranks of a national wrestling company, won a major title, and became a top contender to a heavyweight title. But if you take a wider look at Daniels' nearly two-decade career, he starts to look a bit more like an underachiever. A decade ago, Daniels was on the rise. Today, he's working in front of modest ROH crowds, and is hoping to get the opportunity to get his full-time job back in TNA.

GRADE: B-

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

OVERALL VALUE: As a seasoned veteran with experience on some pretty big stages in WCW and TNA, Daniels is a valuable presence in the ROH locker room. And he's far from washed-up. ROH fans deeply appreciate Daniels' dedication and showmanship, and see him not as an aging TNA dropout, but rather as one of the company's most highly skilled competitors, and a prime candidate to wear the ROH championship. But if Daniels returns to TNA full-time, he's going to have to make his presence felt quickly or he once again will lose ground to less-talented performers.

GRADE: B+

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

1

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

2

3

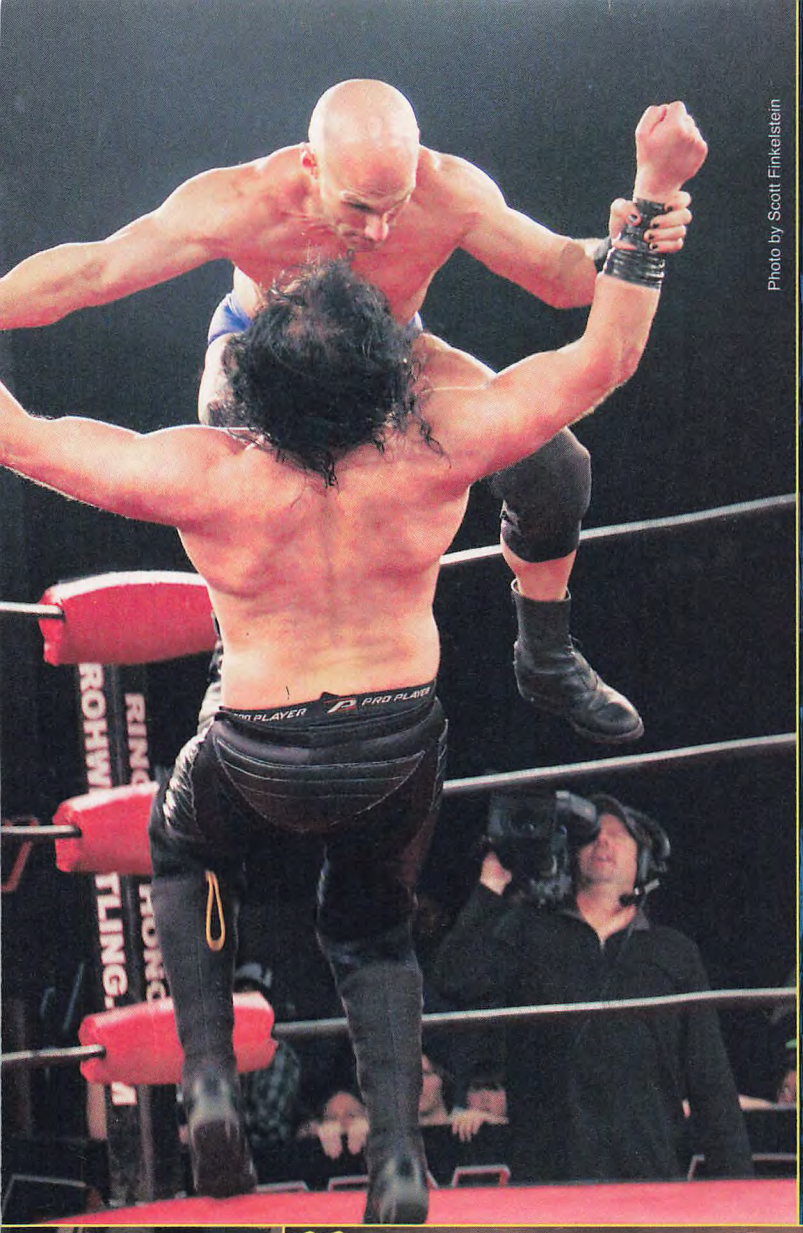


Photo by Scott Finkelstein

CHRISTOPHER DANIELS

1 2 3 4 5

No matter what move he tries, Daniels' form is almost always perfect. Austin Aries is his unfortunate victim here.

With his arms held in place, Devon Storm in his no position to cushion his fall as Daniels pushes off the turnbuckles.

The Angel's Wings is one of the most effective finishers in the sport. Daniels was pleased to perform it against Aries, but he's not the Ring of Honor heavyweight champion anymore. Roderick Strong is.

Daniels' long legs can strike at the most unexpected of times. Strong is unable to defend himself here, but he was able to successfully defend his ROH title.

Many ROH observers are of the opinion that Strong's reign will not last long and that it's just a matter of time before Daniels or his opponent here, Davey Richards, claims the title. So far, Rod has managed to prove them wrong.

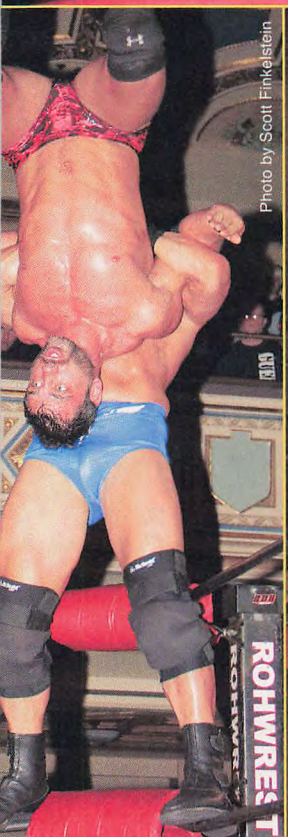


Photo by Scott Finkelstein

4

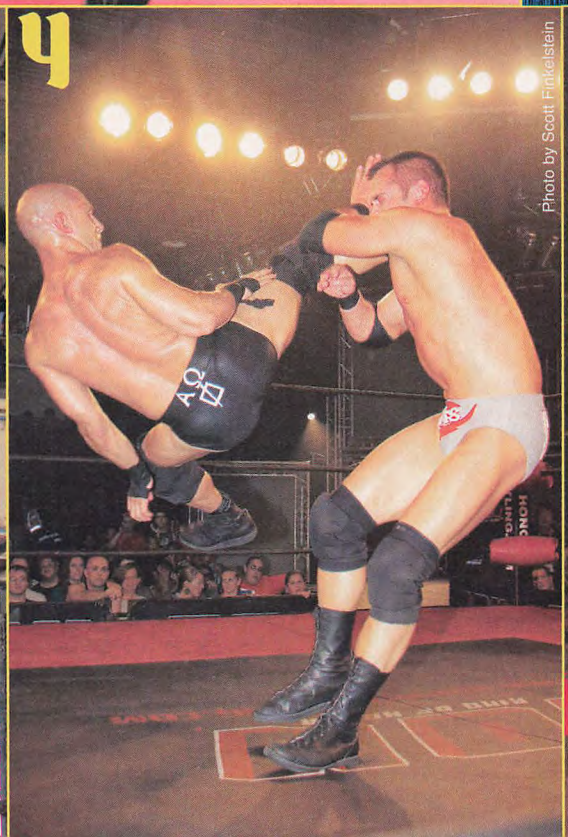


Photo by Scott Finkelstein

5

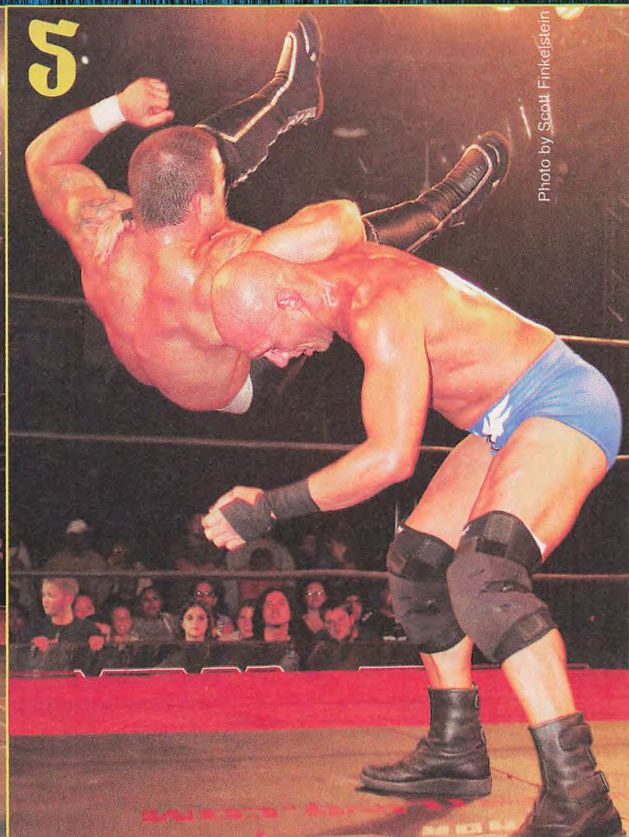
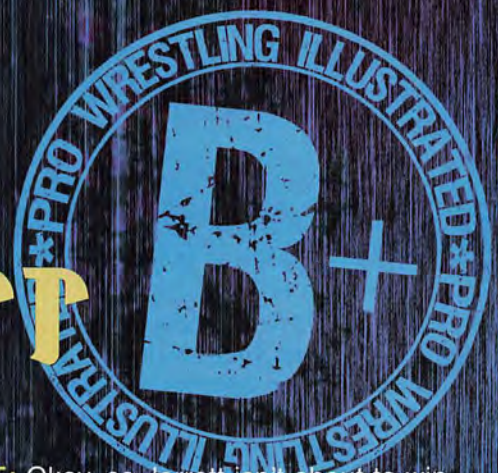


Photo by Scott Finkelstein

JEFF JARRETT



GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: The "King Of The Mountain" hasn't had many opportunities to compete for the TNA championship, but he's done something even more impressive. Jarrett has developed into one of the most consistently entertaining competitors in TNA. His MMA demonstrations were hysterically funny, and his lovey-dovey antics with the former Karen Angle have been comedic gold. Even more impressively, Jarrett has been able to tweak two of the toughest men in TNA in Samoa Joe and Kurt Angle, and has managed to score wins over both. He is wrestling better than he has in years, and he finally freshened up his image. Jeff Jarrett is interesting again.

GRADE: B+

MARKETABILITY: Unfortunately for Jarrett, interesting does not necessarily equal marketable. Jarrett isn't as dynamic or charismatic as Sting, the Hardys, RVD, or Mr. Anderson. Fans aren't buying foam guitars and "Double-J, Double-MA" T-shirts. Jarrett struggled as a main-eventer but he is thriving as an upper mid-card attraction.

GRADE: C+

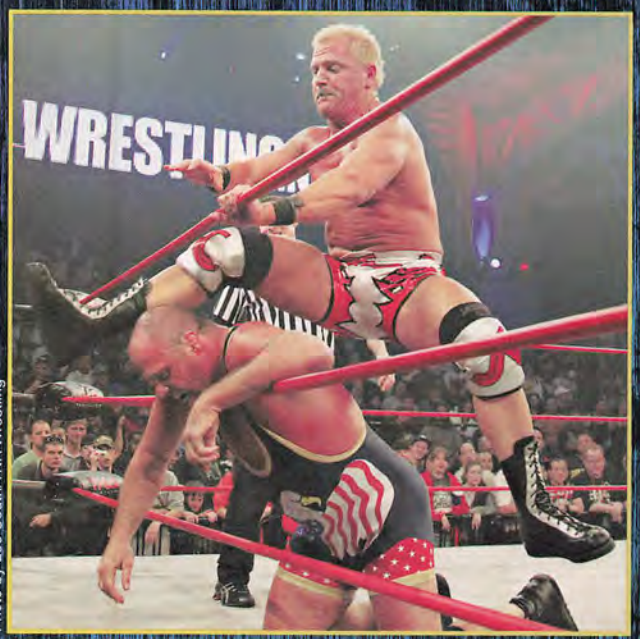


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

REPERTOIRE: Okay, so Jarrett isn't about to win any UFC championships, but he's no slouch in grappling. He successfully incorporated several MMA-inspired locks, takedowns, and submissions into his game over the past year, and the results speak for themselves. Jarrett has nearly a quarter-century of experience and has wrestled—and beaten—dozens of Hall-of-Fame caliber opponents. He's an intelligent ring general and an underrated wrestler with an encyclopedic knowledge of offensive moves, counters, and dirty tricks. Brushing up on his fundamentals and adding some more submissions to his game has made Jarrett more dangerous than ever before … just ask Angle.

GRADE: A

CAREER GROWTH: As TNA champion, Jarrett wore out his welcome. He was overexposed and floundering under the weight of carrying the championship. Now that he has taken a step backward, he is performing better than ever. Title-wise, Jarrett's career has slipped, but he is finally demonstrating that he doesn't need a belt to get the fans' attention. Forget about all world championships; Jarrett's success over the past several years says even more about his legacy as a performer than those championships ever did.

GRADE: A

OVERALL VALUE: If not for Jarrett, there would be no TNA. TNA has demonstrated that it can survive without him, but Jarrett brings an awful lot to the table, especially if he's willing to play a supporting role instead of commanding the spotlight. Jarrett has been a mentor to many TNA stars, including each member of Fortune. He built the company and helped it survive those rocky first years. His relationship with Karen caused a scandal that cost him his position in TNA management, but Jarrett has bounced back and proved he can still be an indispensable part of the company. Jarrett has a knack for bringing the best out of his opponents, and his new charisma and swagger have helped make him one of TNA's best all-around performers.

GRADE: B+

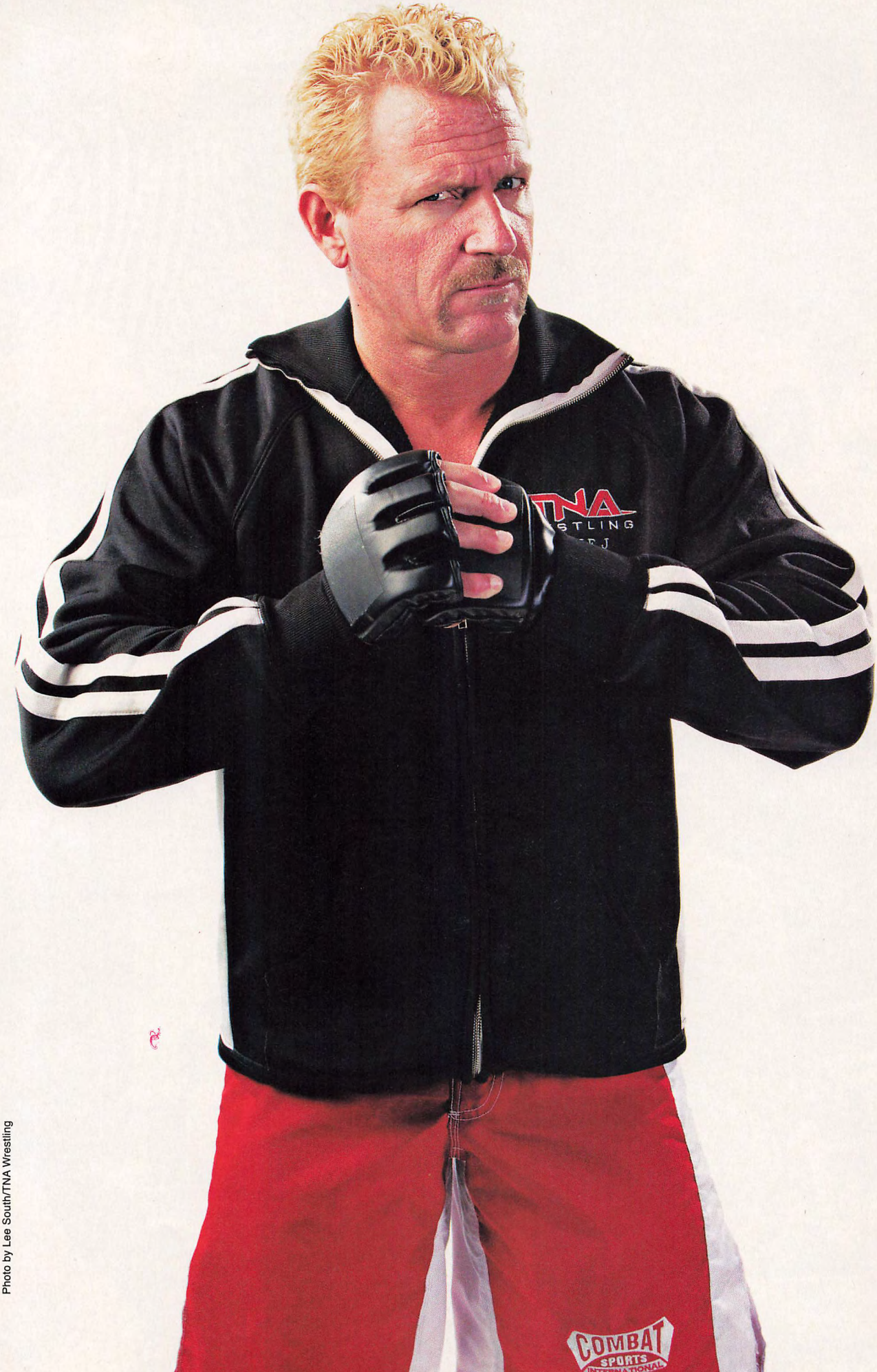
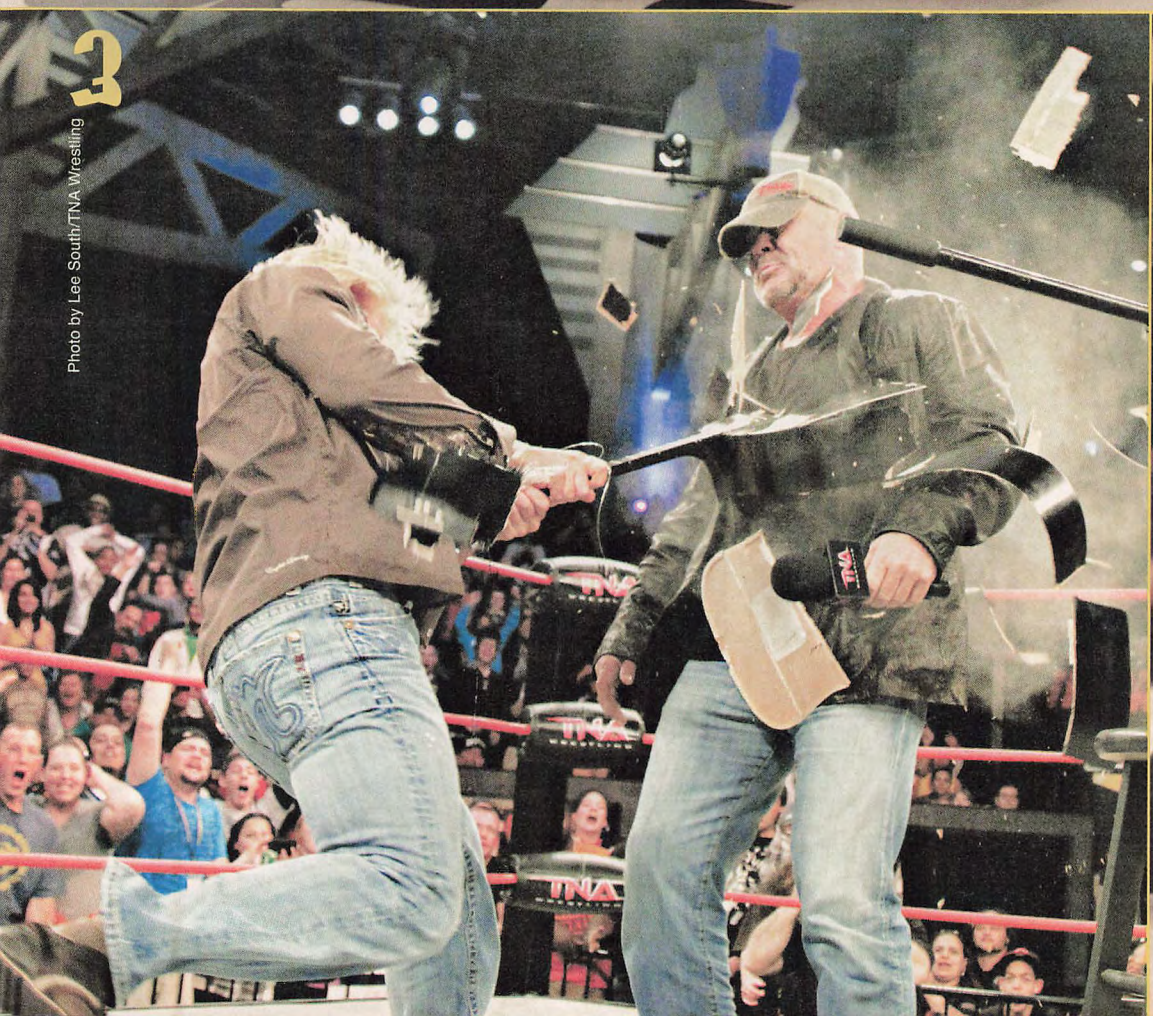


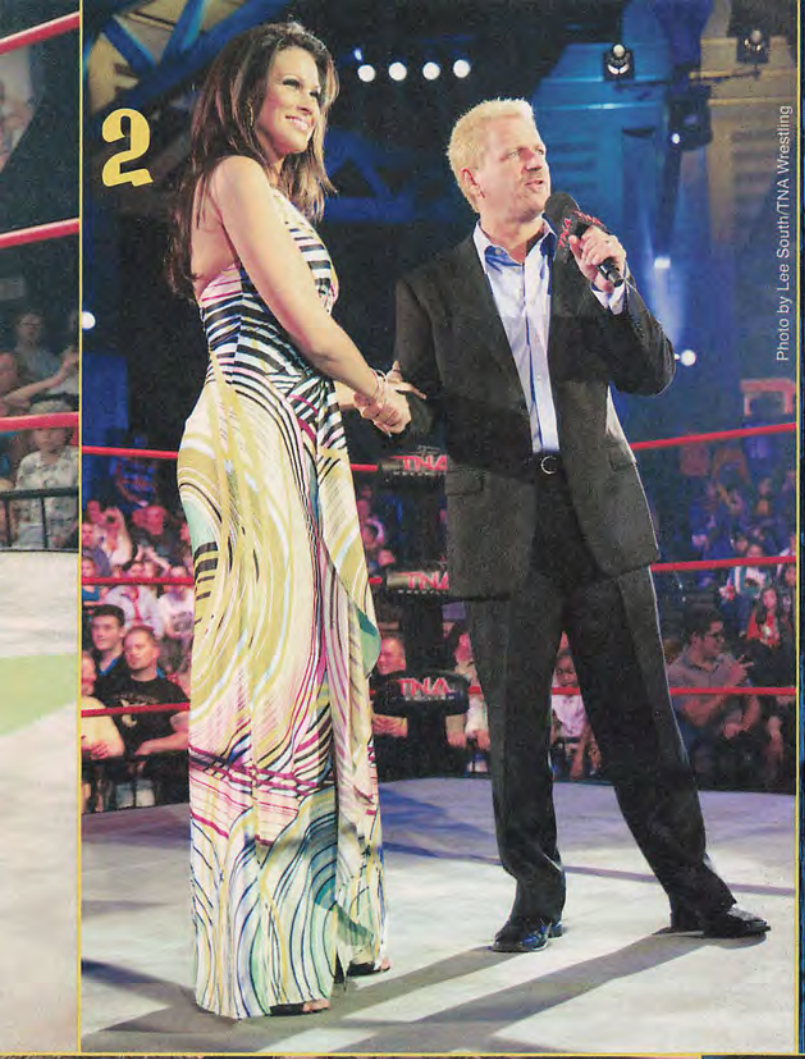
Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

1 Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



3 Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

4 Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



JEFF JARRETT

1 2 3 4 5

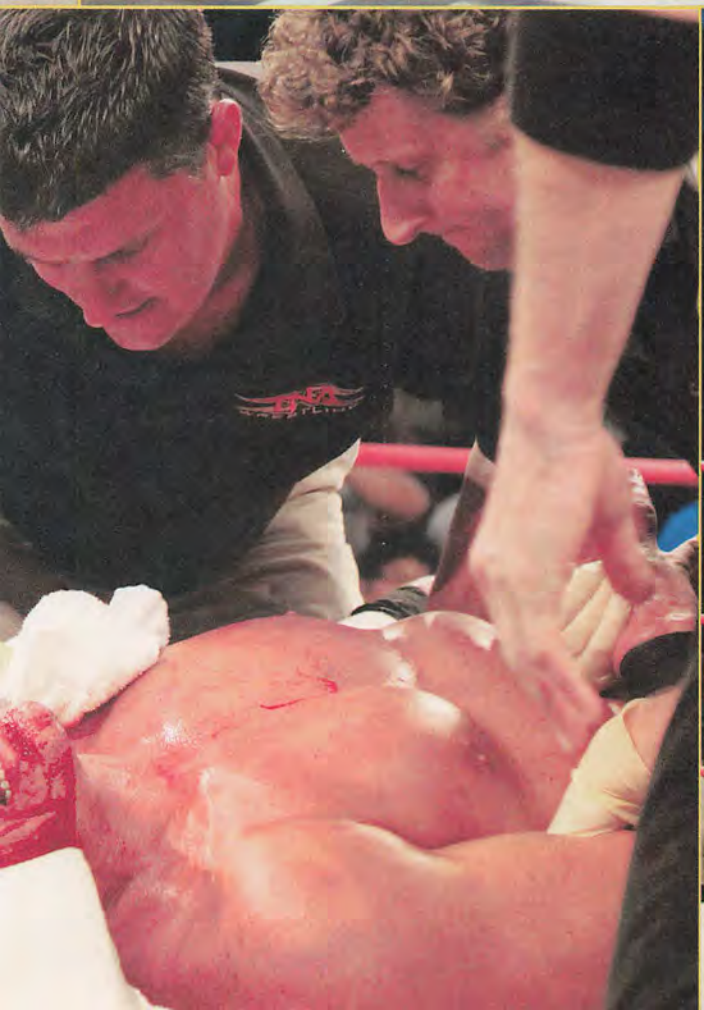
Jarrett's feud with Kurt Angle has mixed athletics with real-life drama in an unprecedented manner. Say what you will about Jarrett, he has to be given credit for being able to hold his own against the Hall-of-Famer.

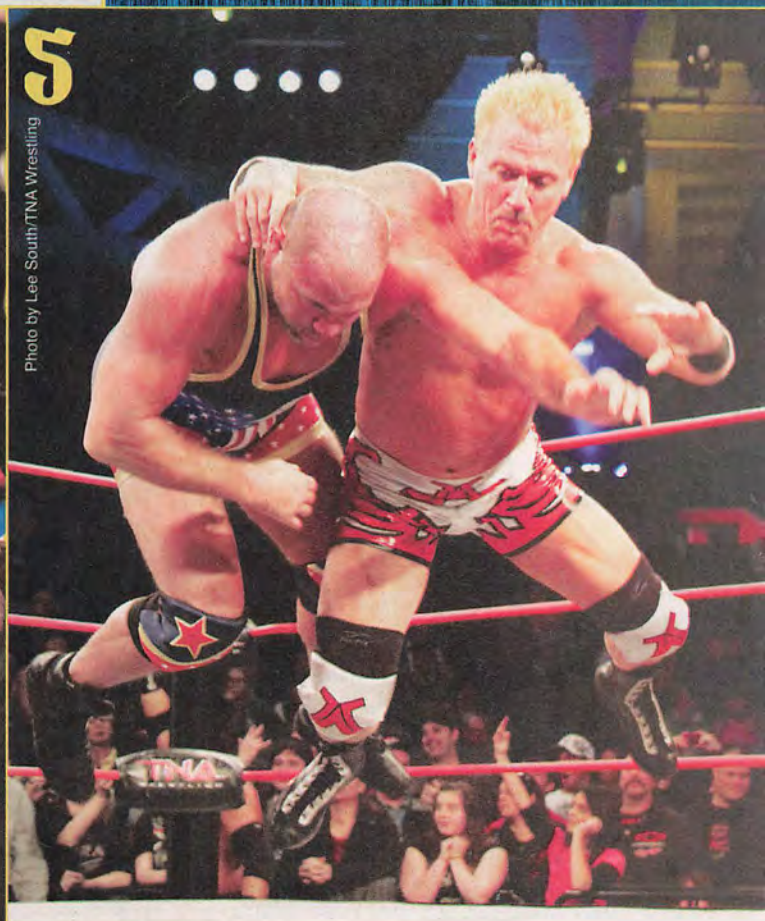
Jarrett's relationship with Angle's ex-wife, Karen, almost cost him his job. The sordid tale has evolved into one of the most intriguing storylines of the year.

It was an embarrassment to Jarrett to be informed by Eric Bischoff that his status as company founder meant nothing in the new regime, and that he'd have to work his way up through the ranks. Well, Jarrett always believed in going right to the top!

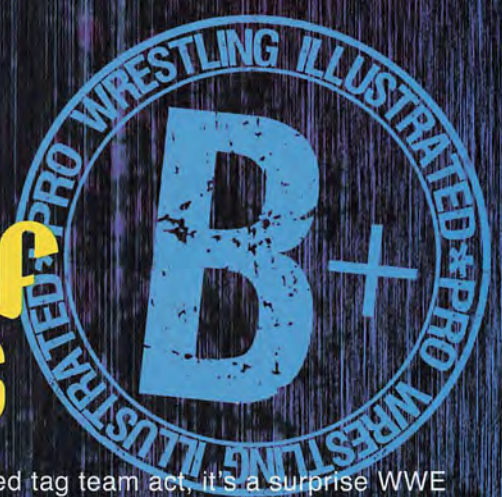
Jarrett has always understood that to attain success you must be willing to sacrifice. He's spilled his share of blood during his 25 years in the sport.

Jarrett may not have the stroke he once did, but Angle certainly feels it here. Don't expect this feud to end anytime soon.





THE KINGS OF WRESTLING



GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Simply put, it's been years since a tag team has enjoyed the kind of success in a major promotion as The Kings of Wrestling have. Since beating The Briscoes for the Ring of Honor tag championship in April, Claudio Castagnoli and Chris Hero have been on a tear, defeating not only every tag team in ROH, but even such notable tandems from outside the promotion as The Motor City Machine Guns and Charlie Haas and Shelton Benjamin. Along the way, they've carved out the longest tag team title reign in ROH history, and it has no obvious end in sight.

GRADE: A

MARKETABILITY: When the Kings first formed five years ago, Hero wore baggy pants and a shirt to disguise his modest physique, and Castagnoli wrestled in a shirt and tie. Today, the Kings look and act every bit the sleek, major-league tag team. Both men have worked hard to improve their looks and speaking ability. In fact, Hero may be the very best talker in all of ROH. And at 6'5", both men also tower over most of their ROH competition. As such a polished tag team act, it's a surprise WWE or TNA hasn't come knocking yet.

GRADE: B+

REPERTOIRE: What's in a name? Castagnoli and Hero can make a valid case for being wrestling royalty, considering their extraordinary arsenal of unique moves. Castagnoli's power and Hero's agility combine for some double-team maneuvers that are as vicious as they are creative. (Castagnoli's swing of an opponent into a Hero dropkick comes to mind.) With years of individual experience in Europe, Mexico, and Japan, the Kings also bring plenty of international flavor to their attack.

GRADE: A

CAREER GROWTH: The downside about reaching the top of your profession is that there's nowhere to go but down. Yes, Castagnoli and Hero have a case for being the greatest tag team in ROH history. But now what? Well into their second year as tag champs, the Kings may have already hit the plateau. For a real challenge, they'll either have to jump to a bigger company or break up and chase some singles gold. Judging from their solid-but-unremarkable past solo runs, the Kings as a team may be more than the sum of their parts.

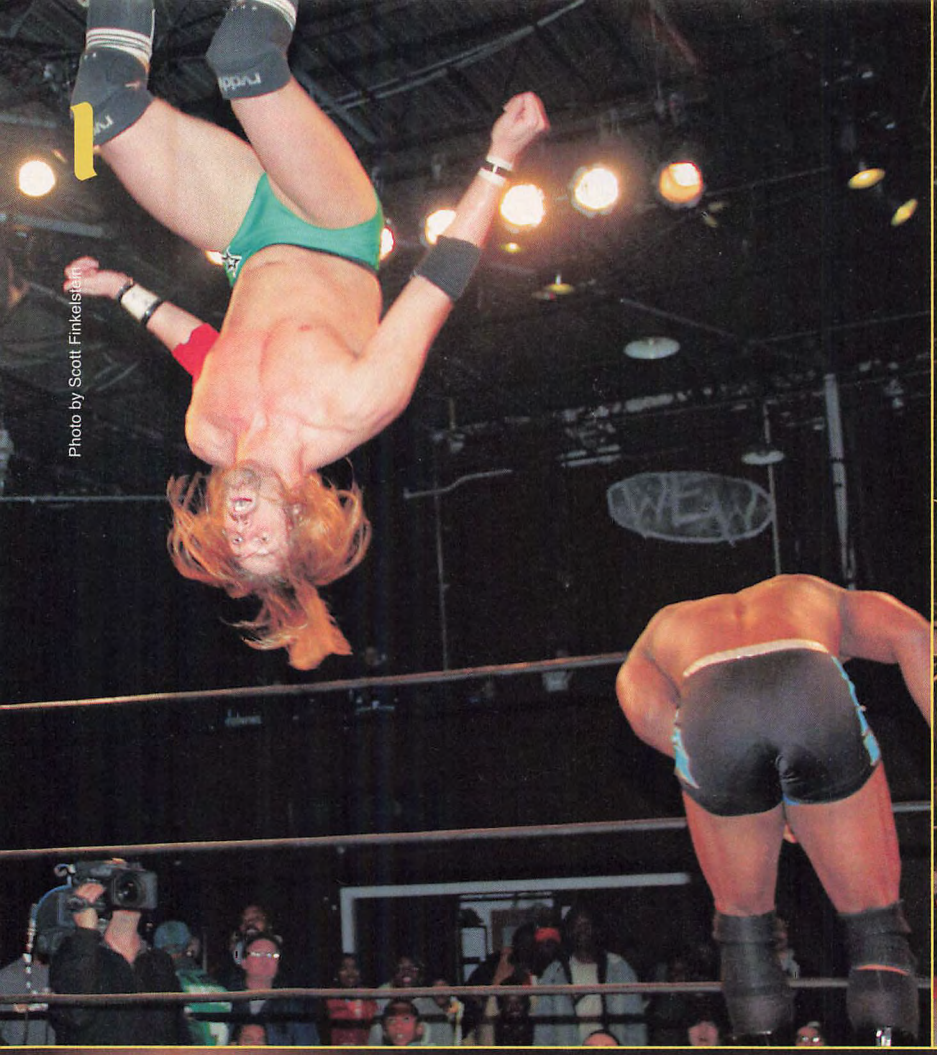
GRADE: B-

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

OVERALL GRADE: While WWE and TNA continue to feature their respective tag team divisions as mid-card attractions, Castagnoli and Hero have proven that the right tag team can have every bit the main-event gravitas as a singles star. In fact, many of the Kings' title defenses have headlined some big ROH shows. And why wouldn't they? The Kings are a joy to watch, and there are two of them.

GRADE: B+

Photo by Stu Saks


1
Photo by Scott Finkelstein

rvddw
rvddw

3
ROH
rohwrestling.com
rvddw
Photo by Scott Finkelstein

4

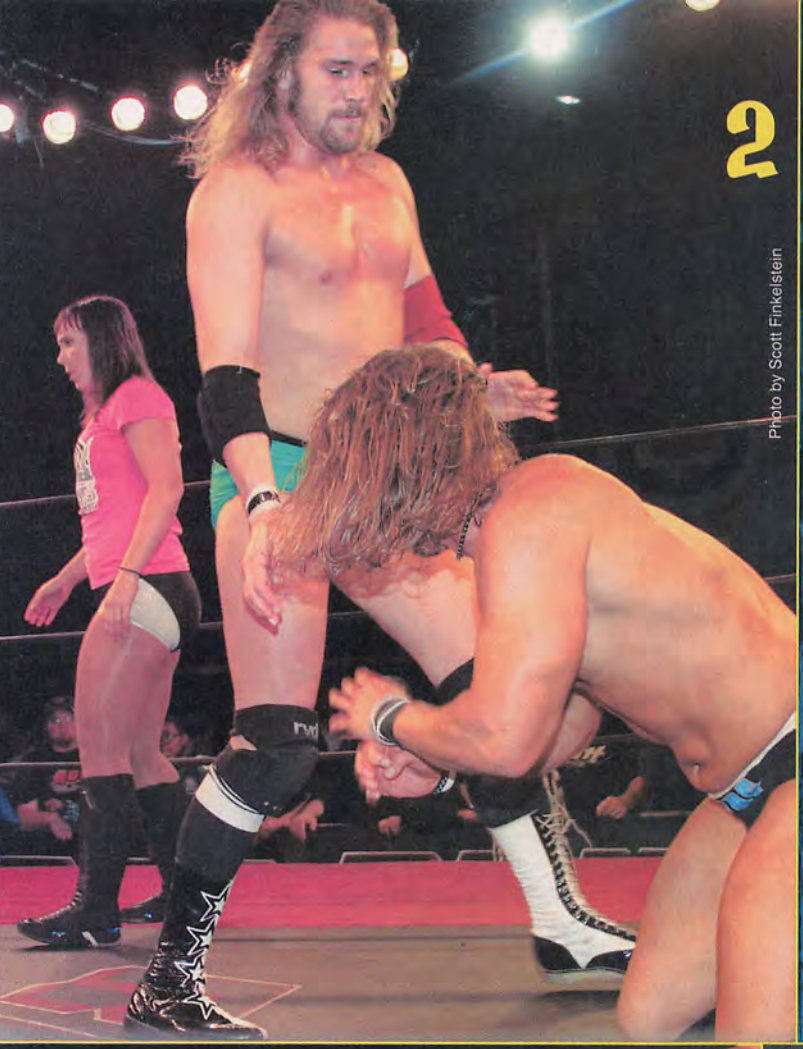


Photo by Scott Finkelstein

2

THE KINGS OF WRESTLING

1 2 3 4 5

If a wrestler ever loses sight of Chris Hero, as is the case here with Kenny King, the best place to look is up. Hero is one of the most agile tall men in the sport.

The Kings of Wrestling have a queen, and her name is Sara Del Rey. When Sara's on hand, it's a good bet that she's going to interfere on Hero and Castagnoli's behalf.

Hero shows off his sole power on the top of Davey Richards' head. Hero will go all-out until he feels a bit winded, and then it's a quick tag to Castagnoli.

Look, Ma, no hands! Castagnoli appears to be going about things a bit casually here, but, in truth, there are few more intense men in the sport than pride of Lucerne, Switzerland.

Despite their size, Hero and Castagnoli each possess an impressive repertoire of mat-based maneuvers and holds. Even a technician like Davey Richards has his hands full trying to outwrestle Castagnoli.

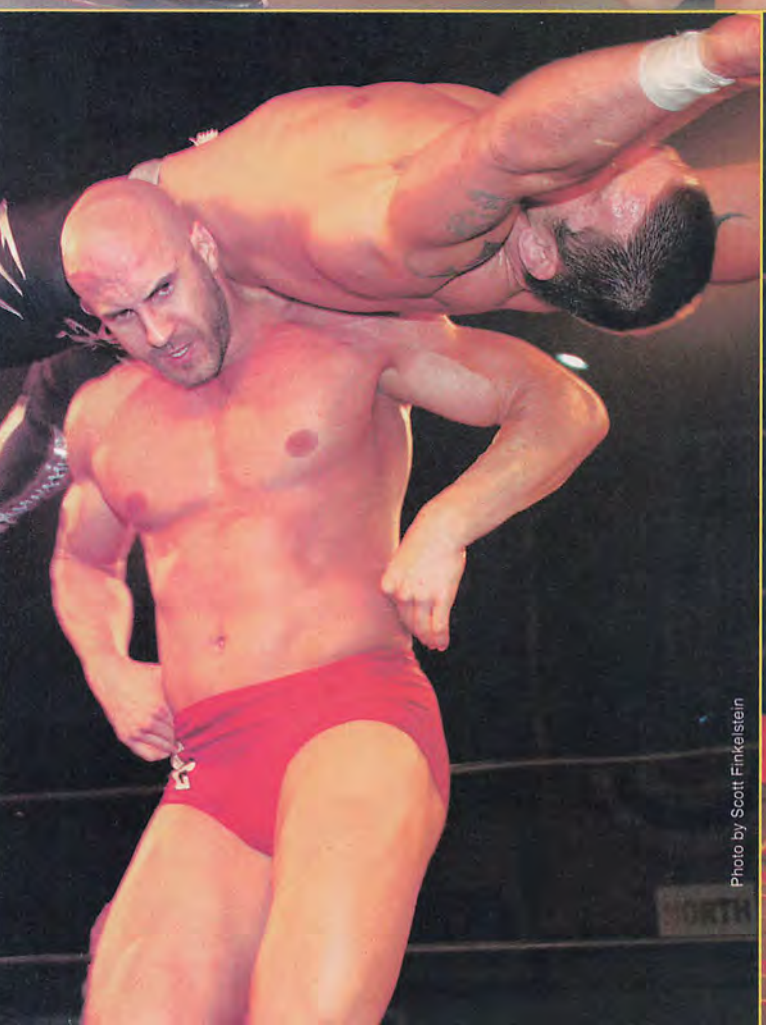
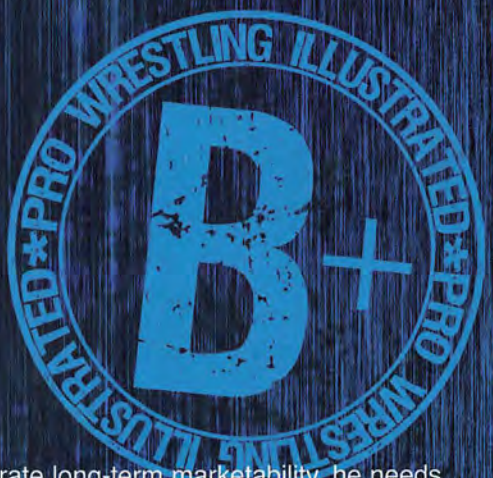


Photo by Scott Finkelstein

5

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

THE MIZ



GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: The Miz has had a sensational—and unprecedented—year. The former reality show star became the unlikeliest WWE champion of all-time. He also held the U.S. title, the Unified tag team title, and was a mentor on two seasons of *NXT*, making him a key player on all three WWE brands. The critics can debate whether or not Miz is a "worthy" champion, but the fact remains that he has managed to make it to the top level of WWE and make it to WrestleMania 27 as the WWE champion. It was a spectacular year all around.

GRADE: A+

MARKETABILITY: After winning the WWE championship, Miz embarked on a whirlwind media tour. He made the most of his media appearances with some great interviews. But Miz is also a polarizing figure. The majority of wrestling fans don't see him a credible champion, and Miz is doing little to erase that perception. He was capable of creating short-term interest, but to demonstrate long-term marketability, he needs to prove himself to the critics and demonstrate that he is capable of a long championship run.

GRADE: B

Photo By George Napolitano

REPERTOIRE: The Miz has managed to make the most out of a limited repertoire, largely because his opponents underestimate his tenacity and speed. Miz has a very limited ground game, a non-existent aerial game, and only basic brawling skills. He usually gets out-classed early until he can capitalize on a distraction from Alex Riley to take the advantage. He relies on basic chinlocks and punches until he can catch his opponent with the Skull-Crushing Finale, which is executed with lightning quickness and maximum impact. If anyone can counter that move, Miz is helpless.

GRADE: C

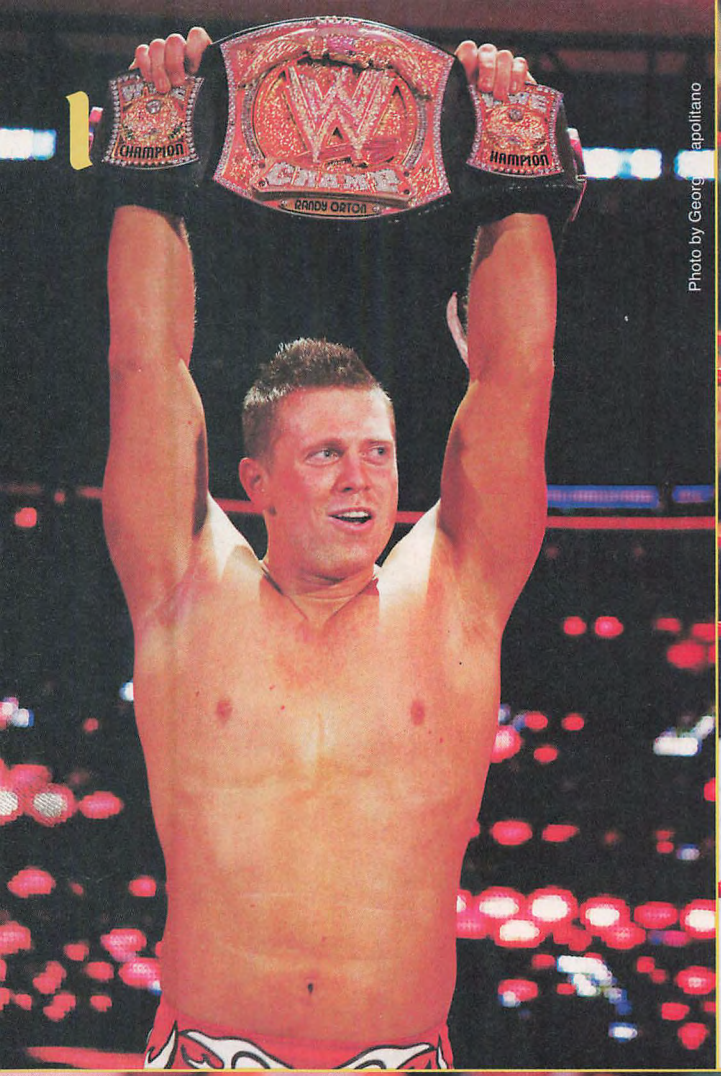
CAREER GROWTH: The burning question right now is whether The Miz has staying power. He has been WWE's top villain for the past half-year, largely because his rise to the WWE championship was so unexpected. He came a long way in a short period of time. It will be interesting to see how Miz fares in the time between WrestleMania 27 and SummerSlam; that should be a good indication of whether he can remain at his current level, or whether he's about to come crashing back down to the mid-card … where some say he belongs.

GRADE: A

OVERALL VALUE: Some critics contend that the fact that he was able to capture the most visible championship belt in wrestling makes a mockery of the entire sport. Others have speculated that Miz is the prototype for wrestling's future: a young, flashy competitor who is talented on the microphone and appealing to the mainstream media. The fact of the matter is that it is too soon to know Miz' true value to WWE. The company apparently has high hopes for him, but it is noteworthy that WWE called in The Rock to guest-host WrestleMania instead of letting Miz and Cena carry the ball on their own. It seems WWE is hedging its bets.

GRADE: B+

Photo By Wayne McCarty



1

Photo by George Napolitano

2

Photo by George Napolitano

4

Photo by George Napolitano

Photo by George Napolitano

THE MIZ

1 2 3 4 5

Say what you will about The Miz, but after winning the WWE title from Randy Orton, Miz found himself at a level most felt he'd never reach.

Miz seems entirely comfortable portraying an insufferable blowhard. However, some clean victories over more top-flight stars would make him even more marketable to fans.

Miz' limited repertoire is one of the reasons some fans refused to acknowledge him as a credible champion. Adding a submission finisher to his arsenal would buy him some legitimacy.

Miz' journey from *Tough Enough* contestant to WWE champion has been impressive. During the height of *Raw*'s guest host era, Miz often shared the spotlight with the hosts such as Pee Wee Herman, whom he would invariably bait and insult.

Whether they boo him or cheer him, The Miz always knows how to elicit a reaction from the WWE Universe. Clearly, Miz is most satisfied when he can agitate the WWE fans.

Photo by Matt Roberts

THE UNDERTAKER'S CAREER: A YEAR-BY-YEAR REPORT CARD

Compiled by Harry Burkett

HE IS MORE than a "Dead Man." He is the lifeblood of WWE. Mark Calaway has used his creativity, work ethic, and dedication to self-improvement to transform a one-dimensional gimmick into a sports-entertainment phenomenon.

In this exclusive analysis, we have evaluated each year of The Undertaker's career and given him the appropriate letter grades. He went from earning a C- in 1984-86 to scoring an A in 2010, with a few A+ grades in between. Keep in mind Undertaker's regular report-card grade of C reflects the evaluation period between WrestleManias 26 and 27. Our final grade of A in this tribute section reflects only the year 2010 and takes into account The Undertaker's historical impact, a standard that doesn't penalize Undertaker quite as harshly for missing ring time due to injuries.

Speaking of historical impact, you'll notice three distinct threads that have weaved together the mythology of The Undertaker: Paul Bearer, Kane, and The Streak. William Moody, as Percy Pringle, managed Calaway—then known as Texas Red—in his 1984 debut. He was his occasional manager in World Class Championship Wrestling, and this previous relationship led to natural chemistry when he joined The Undertaker as Paul Bearer. The ghoulish manager betrayed Undertaker and brought his half-brother Kane to the WWF. Kane has been Undertaker's partner, occasionally joining 'Taker to form the awesome Brothers of Destruction tag team, but, more importantly, has been his arch-nemesis, facing UT at WrestleManias XIV and XX.

And there's the third thread: the WrestleMania streak. Twelve years ago, we released a special issue (*Wrestling Supercards: WrestleMania* Summer 1999) that was the first publication to bring attention to The Undertaker's undefeated streak. We asserted that The Undertaker's win-loss record of 6-0 made him—not Hulk Hogan—the true star of WrestleMania. "There have been quiet success stories, too," we wrote. "Did you know, for example, that The Undertaker has more WrestleMania victories than any other superstar? 'Taker has vanquished many towering enemies of the night, including Giant Gonzales, Sid Vicious, and Kane."

Soon the WWF hype machine jumped on this largely unrecognized fact and made The Undertaker's streak a cornerstone of WrestleMania. The very nature of the streak ensures that it becomes more important with each passing year, with the ante sitting at 18-0 as of press time. WWE deals the cards in this game of high-stakes poker, but it's The Undertaker sitting at the head of table with a full house every year. He won't fold and he won't be bluffed. But it's likely that a younger player will reveal a better hand one day. Who will receive the awesome boost that will result from ending the mighty streak?

It was once inconceivable that any one superstar could become bigger than WrestleMania. Thanks to 27 years of hard work and the greatest streak in sports, The Undertaker might have done just that.

©1997 World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc. All Rights Reserved

1984-1986

The Undertaker knows all about paying his dues, and that work ethic is evident in his ring work to this day. Back in the mid-1980s, before the era of slick developmental programs, getting into the business could be a major hassle, a matter of dealing with shady conmen and rough characters just to catch a break.

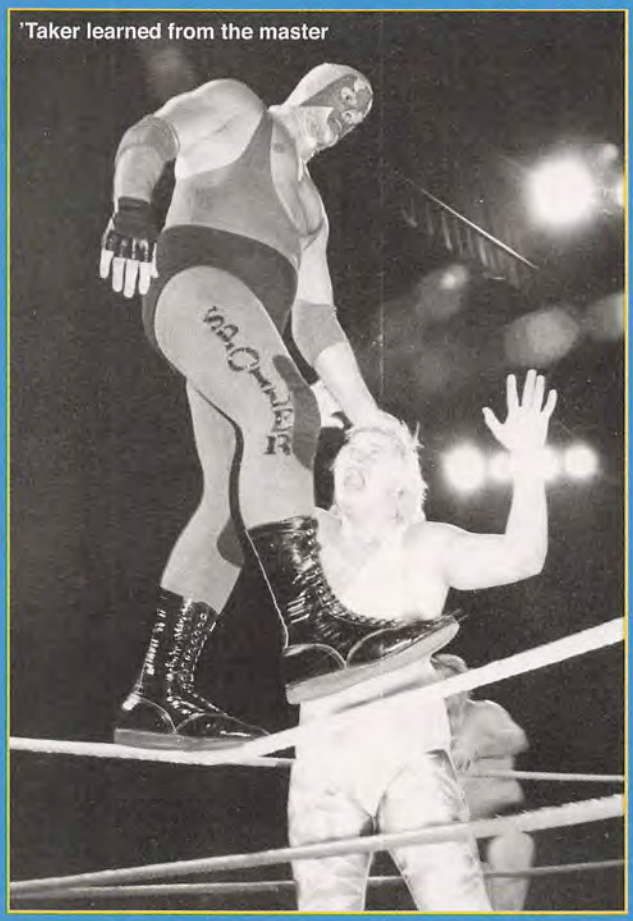
It was no different for Mark Calaway. In *Bodyslams! Memoirs Of A Wrestling Pitchman*, longtime ring announcer Gary Michael Cappetta, a friend of Calaway's during the early years, shares the story of how Calaway—who had just graduated from Waltrip High School in Houston—borrowed $2,000 from his brother in order to attend Buzz Sawyer's training school. Sawyer, according to Cappetta, skipped town with all the trainees' money, and Calaway learned his first valuable lesson in the wrestling business.

He then contacted World Class Championship Wrestling promoter Fritz Von Erich, who referred him to Don Jardine, otherwise known as The Spoiler. Jardine encouraged Calaway to incorporate agility and high-impact moves into his repertoire, instead of relying simply on his size. The Undertaker's old-school walk along the top rope is a tribute to the late Jardine.

Calaway then signed on with World Class, where—as the masked Texas Red—Bruiser Brody beat him up in his debut match. Calaway realized that Brody was doing him a favor by teaching him respect for the business. It seemed that Brody set himself as a role model for Calaway, who would later draw comparisons with the Albuquerque wildman not only in terms of size, but ring style and mystique. Even the Texas Red persona was patterned after Brody's masked alter-ego, Red River Jack.

Here's an interesting side note about his debut: Texas Red was managed by Percival Pringle III, who would later become known as Paul Bearer.

GRADE: C-



'Taker learned from the master

1987-1988

As Texas Red, Calaway was briefly affiliated with Percy Pringle, alongside stablemates such as Rick Rude, The Dingo Warrior (later known as The Ultimate Warrior), Cactus Jack Manson (Mick Foley), and strongman Ted Arcidi. In the spring of 1987, Red recognized a golden opportunity when World Class officials announced that the promotion would be resurrecting the Texas tag team title, which had been vacant since Chris Adams and Gino Hernandez had abandoned it in 1985.

Red joined forces with Arcidi, who was most famous for his brief WWF run and appearance in the pro wrestlers/football players battle royal at WrestleMania 2, to defeat his two mentors, Brody and Spoiler, in the opening round of the tourney. If that win weren't impressive enough, they went on to defeat the ultra-popular Fantastics in the semifinals.

On the other side of the bracketing, Tony Atlas and Skip Young had overcome Brian Adias and Al Perez in the opening round, and defeated Killer Brooks and Len Denton in the second round. In the end, the combined experience of Atlas and Young paid off, and they beat Red and Arcidi in the tournament final on June 27 in Fort Worth.

During these early years with World Class, Calaway also had been attending Angelina College in Lufkin, Texas, on a basketball scholarship, and went on to Texas Wesleyan University in Fort Worth, where he played basketball and studied sports management.

By 1988, Calaway was able to pursue wrestling full-time. While Calaway had been fortunate to compete in World Class during its boon period, which included an overseas tour to South Africa, he was anxious to experiment with new identities and different promotions. After a few appearances as The Commando in Central Illinois Wrestling, he was ready for the big break that was about to come in Memphis.

GRADE: B

Photo by Sam Lowe

Master of Pain (1989)

1989

The Punisher overwhelms Terry Gordy

Memphis bookers saw dollar signs in the 6'8" frame of young Mark Calaway, and they gave him a big push from the very start. As The Master of Pain, Calaway had a series of managers, including Dutch Mantel, Downtown Bruno, and Ronnie Gossett. He was portrayed as an unstoppable monster, and he rode that momentum to a USWA title victory over Jerry Lawler on April 1, 1989.

Unfortunately, the continuing fallout from the title-unification bout between AWA champ Jerry Lawler and World Class champ Kerry Von Erich in December 1988 overshadowed The Master of Pain's title reign. Lawler had won that match on a technicality, and Lawler and Von Erich were still bickering over who was the rightful unified champion—even while Master of Pain actually held the belt! When Lawler regained the title on April 25, the Master faded from the main-event scene.

Master of Pain scored a big win in Lawler's Championship Wrestling Association, beating "Dirty" Dutch Mantel in a loser-leaves-town match. Texas Dirt, a masked man widely believed to be Mantel, appeared on the scene and challenged The Master of Pain to another loser-leaves-town match. The Master lost this time around, and he was forced to leave the CWA.

It was back to Texas, where Calaway donned the hood as The Punisher, a member of Gen. Skandor Akbar's Devastation Inc. The Punisher won the Texas State title by forfeit from Eric Embry on October 5, but lost it to Kerry Von Erich by the end of the month.

Calaway was enjoying the greatest year of his career thus far and his future seemed even brighter when he received an offer from WCW late in the year. After only a handful of singles matches as "Mean" Mark Callous, he replaced Sid Vicious, who had suffered a collapsed lung, as Dan Spivey's partner in The Skyscrapers, managed by Theodore Long.

GRADE: B+

1990

Skyscrapers Version 2.0, with Dan Spivey

Calaway's career moved at lightning speed in 1989, yet that wouldn't compare to the rapid-fire highs and lows he would experience in 1990—all in the glare of the national spotlight. Callous jumped right in to resume The Skyscrapers' feud with The Road Warriors, and they even scored a disqualification victory over Animal and Hawk. The Skyscrapers' days came to an end, however, when Dan Spivey abruptly left WCW.

That left "Mean" Mark to pursue a singles career. He enjoyed a hot streak in the spring and summer, beating Johnny Ace at Capitol Combat and defeating Brian Pillman at Clash of the Champions. He even participated in a New Japan tour, where he appeared as "Punisher" Dice Morgan. But Calaway's momentum came to a dead stop when U.S. champion Lex Luger defeated him soundly at the Great American Bash, using a simple clothesline to score the pinfall.

But at least "Mean" Mark went out close to the top, as he lost to NWA World champion Sting in his final WCW match on September 1. WCW executives opted not to renew Calaway's contract, assuming he'd never become a big star. The spurned Calaway visited Vince McMahon at Titan Towers, but the WWF owner didn't have an opening for him at the time. Calaway briefly returned to Memphis, where he competed in a USWA title tournament, before he finally received the call.

"Hi, are you The Undertaker?"

That's how McMahon invited Calaway to the WWF. Although he debuted as Cain the Undertaker—managed by Brother Love—at a November 19 taping of *Superstars*, most fans didn't see him until three days later when he appeared simply as "The Undertaker" as part of Ted DiBiase's Million-Dollar Team against Dusty Rhodes' Dream Team.

Calaway was on his path to becoming a legend.

GRADE: A-

In full 'Taker garb (1992)

1991

The outlandish and self-centered Brother Love was not a good fit as The Undertaker's manager, so Love sold the 25-year-old's contract to Paul Bearer (William Moody) in early-1991. Calloway had trusted Moody since his Texas days. Although they seemed light years from Texas Red and Percival Pringle III, The Undertaker and Paul Bearer were a perfect fit. And McMahon wanted to push Undertaker as far as he could go.

Consider the three elements that made the Undertaker-Bearer tandem a success from the outset: The "Funeral Parlor" interview segment, which guaranteed Bearer and Undertaker a presence on *Superstars* every week; the mystical urn, which imbued the "Dead Man" with a surge of life whenever his opponent gained the advantage; and the fact that Undertaker—being "undead"—didn't have to sell for his opponents.

And, oh, yeah, Undertaker placed his fallen foes in body-bags after his matches. A stronger statement couldn't have been made for his dominance.

The Undertaker went on to begin his heralded WrestleMania streak with a convincing win over the WWF's original "Phenom," Jimmy Snuka, at 'Mania VII; instigate a feud with The Ultimate Warrior by placing him in a casket; and form an alliance with Jake Roberts in a feud with Randy Savage and Sid Justice. And, thanks to Ric Flair's interference with a steel chair, Undertaker upset Hulk Hogan for the WWF World title at Survivor Series. Hogan regained the belt a few weeks later by blinding 'Taker with ashes from his urn, prompting WWF President Jack Tunney to declare the championship vacant.

Yet neither that controversy—nor the furor over his weird persona—could take away from Undertaker's success in 1991. Now 26 years of age, 'Taker had already been WWF champion ... and he hadn't even peaked yet.

PWI Awards: Feud of the Year (vs. The Ultimate Warrior); Most Hated (first runner-up)

GRADE: A+

Untertaker and Bearer dump Warrior in a casket

1992

Did the "Dead Man" have a soul? Fans still weren't sure about that yet, but The Undertaker showed plenty of heart in the 1992 Royal Rumble, where the winner would be awarded the vacant WWF World title. The Undertaker was eliminated by arch-rival Hulk Hogan in that event, and Ric Flair went on to win the Rumble and the World title. As Flair's feud with former champ Randy Savage escalated, Undertaker became embroiled in a controversy that would make him an unlikely fan favorite.

Jake "The Snake" Roberts had been serving as Undertaker's mentor, helping the "Dead Man" with his promos outside the ring and establishing him as an evil apprentice inside it. But Roberts went too far when he ambushed Savage and tried to hit Elizabeth with a steel chair. Undertaker blocked the chair shot, infuriating Roberts, who confronted him on "The Funeral Parlor." "Whose side are you on?" Roberts demanded to know. When Undertaker responded, "Not yours," Roberts caught Undertaker's hand inside the casket on the "Funeral Parlor" set and DDT'd Paul Bearer on the concrete. Undertaker won their grudge match at WrestleMania VIII, extending his record to 2-0.

So the "Dead Man" proved he did have a soul. He also became known for carrying vendettas, and he had one brutal feud after another during this phase of his career, establishing himself as the WWF's monster-slayer. He had one such feud with Kamala, which continued for six months during the summer and fall of 1992, with Undertaker scoring a victory over Harvey Wippleman's charge at SummerSlam and then defeating the "Ugandan Headhunter" in a casket match at Survivor Series.

Obviously, the fans hadn't softened Undertaker into a kinder, gentler "Dead Man." He was just as ruthless as ever, and that's why his cult following blossomed into a wrestling phenomenon.

PWI Awards: Most Popular (second runner-up)

GRADE: B+

1993

Vince McMahon faced a problem with The Undertaker. In fact, it was the same problem the McMahon family had faced with Andre the Giant. By portraying these men as indestructible forces, they couldn't be overexposed on the main-event level. Unlike Andre years earlier, Undertaker couldn't be loaned out to the territories. Instead, he was relegated to being a sideshow attraction, involved in some very cartoonish rivalries.

The prime example of this was the 7'7" Giant Gonzales. Besides the spectacle of wearing a ridiculous full bodysuit, Gonzales was extremely limited in the ring and didn't have the charisma of either Andre or Kamala. Their feud started when Gonzales, who was not an official participant in The Royal Rumble, interfered and eliminated The Undertaker mid-way through the event. That led to a showdown at WrestleMania IX, where Gonzales used a chloroform-soaked rag to render Undertaker unconscious, prompting the referee to award the match to 'Taker by disqualification. Although Undertaker chased Gonzales out of the ring immediately afterward, their feud evolved into a battle over Undertaker's urn and stretched all the way into SummerSlam, where 'Taker harnessed the power of the urn to win the match.

1994

The Undertaker had not only faced down Yokozuna at Survivor Series, but he had also survived the WWF World champion's feared Banzai Drop. The champ was terrified during the weeks leading to their casket match at The Royal Rumble. That meant Yokozuna and diabolical managers Jim Cornette and Mr. Fuji had to think of a plan.

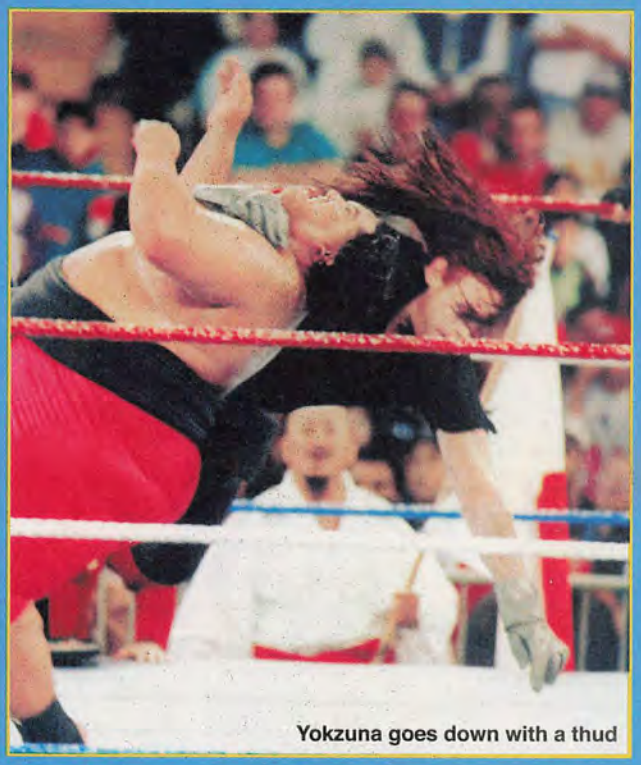
Undertaker's mind games continued, however, as he had a doublewide casket specially constructed for Yokozuna. How could Yoko possibly survive the 6'8" "Phenom"?

Yokozuna endured The Undertaker's methodical offense in the early going, and, in desperation, threw salt into his eyes. Undertaker rallied and miraculously planted the 589-pounder with a chokeslam and dropped him with a running DDT. Undertaker rolled Yokozuna into the casket and was about to shut the lid when Crush led nearly a dozen heels to the ring, where they beat down 'Taker and rolled *him* into the casket.

But not so fast. Paul Bearer raised the mystical urn, allowing Undertaker to feel its power. Life surged through the "Dead Man's" body and he rose up against his foes, leveling each, one by one. He

Undertaker ended 1993 on a positive note, and perhaps foreshadowed his future "American Badass" persona, when he teamed with Lex Luger and The Steiner Brothers as "The All-Americans" to defeat "The Foreign Fanatics," comprised of Yokozuna, Ludvig Borga, Crush, and Jacques Rougeau at Survivor Series. When Undertaker and WWF champ Yokozuna eliminated each other by countout during that match, with both being depicted as unstoppable forces, it seemed Undertaker might have another go-round with the WWF title in 1994. The fact was that if The Undertaker wasted another year, as he had with Gonzales in 1993, his WWF career was as good as six feet under.

GRADE: B-



Yokzuna goes down with a thud

seemed invincible until Yokozuna snatched the urn from Bearer, and a green mist came out of it. The spirit sapped from Undertaker's body and Yokozuna kicked his lifeless carcass into the casket to retain the WWF title.

The Undertaker was gone for several months, missing WrestleMania IX. In the meantime, Ted DiBiase brought an impostor Undertaker to the WWF. Portrayed by Brian Lee, this Undertaker was dubbed the "Underfaker" by fans. The real Undertaker returned at SummerSlam, where he trounced 'Faker with three Tombstone piledrivers.

At Survivor Series, Undertaker met Yokozuna in a much-anticipated rematch, where ringside enforcer Chuck Norris helped to maintain order, enabling Undertaker to score a clean win over the former champ.

GRADE: A

1995

Ted DiBiase declared war on The Undertaker, and he sent one member of his Million-Dollar Corporation after another to try to destroy him. And it was a frustrating experience, too, because DiBiase discovered that he couldn't buy a "Dead Man's" soul.

The Undertaker trounced DiBiase's personal accountant, Irwin R. Schyster, at the 1995 Royal Rumble, but the defeated IRS stole The Undertaker's urn as King Kong Bundy sneak-attacked 'Taker, delivering a big splash to leave him lifeless in the ring.

DiBiase knew the urn was the source of Undertaker's power, and that's why he made its capture a top priority. But the Million-Dollar Corporation lost possession of the urn at WrestleMania XI, where Bundy fell to The Undertaker in a special-stipulation match.

Yet DiBiase found another way to pry the urn from Undertaker's cold, dead fingers. DiBiase introduced Kama (later known as The Godfather), otherwise known as the "Supreme Fighting Machine." Kama stole the urn and melted it down into a gold chain. Undertaker and Paul Bearer were outraged. The urn had been melted down into bling!

Kama also sidetracked Undertaker's professional ambitions, causing him to lose a quarterfinal bout to Mabel in the 1995 King of the Ring tournament. But Undertaker proved his dominance over Kama by defeating him in a casket match at the first-ever In Your House pay-per-view and again in a high-profile bout at SummerSlam.

'Taker suffered the first major injury of his career, a cracked orbital bone, in the fall of 1995, when Mabel and Yokozuna attacked Undertaker on *Monday Night Raw*. He missed several weeks of action, but returned wearing a Gothic protective mask. Undertaker gained revenge against Mabel in a series of bouts, although—oddly enough—the "Dead Man" had to rely on Kama's bling (actually, the melted-down urn) to summon the power for his miraculous comebacks.

GRADE: A-

1996

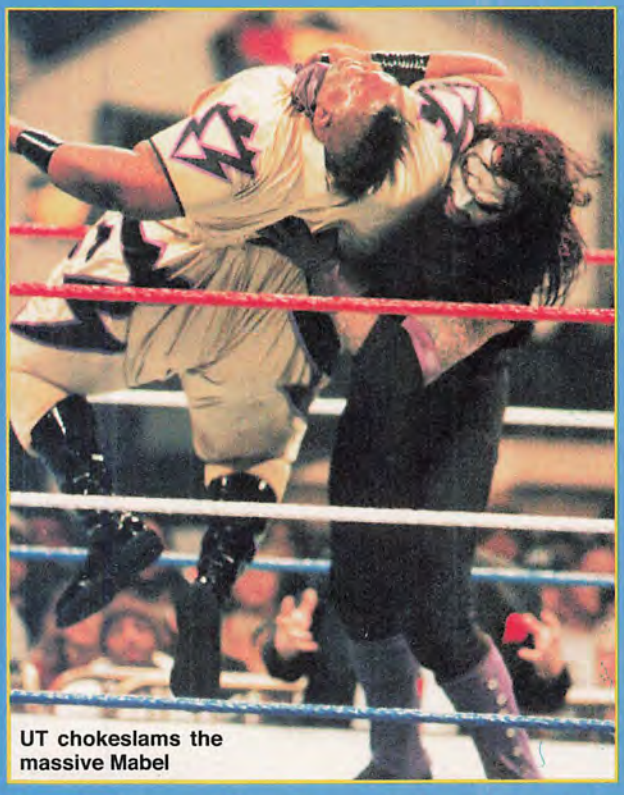
WWF Interim President Gorilla Monsoon announced that The Undertaker was the new top contender to the World title at the close of 1995 and that he would receive a title shot against champion Bret Hart at the 1996 Royal Rumble, but there was one man who was infuriated by this turn of events: Diesel.

The former champ felt he was the true number-one contender, and even went as far as to attack Undertaker on his way to the ring for his match against Hart. Diesel's interference would give Undertaker the DQ win, but cost him the championship.

Vengeance was The Undertaker's at the following month's In Your House when Diesel faced Hart inside a steel cage. UT came up through the canvas, as if from the bowels of Hell, and pulled Diesel down with him in a puff of white smoke.

The result of Undertaker's match against Diesel at WrestleMania XII was a foregone conclusion, considering Kevin Nash had already given notice that he was headed for WCW. 'Taker shook off two jackknife power bombs to take his 'Mania streak to 5-0.

The biggest challenge of Undertaker's career came in the form of a demented foe, Mankind (Mick Foley). Mankind beat UT by kayo at King of the Ring, freaking out Paul Bearer to the point that he switched sides during their Boiler Room Brawl at SummerSlam, cracking the urn over Undertaker's head to give Mankind the win.



UT chokeslams the massive Mabel

Mankind beat Undertaker yet again in the first-ever Buried Alive match in the fall of 1996. Undertaker didn't score a definitive win over his nemesis until Survivor Series, where he planted Mankind with the Tombstone piledriver. Another Bearer stooge, The Executioner (Terry Gordy), attacked Undertaker after the match, leading to 'Taker executing The Executioner at the December In Your House PPV.

PWI Awards: Feud of the Year (vs. Mankind, second runner-up)

GRADE: B

If looks could kill ... (1995)

1997

Fortunately for The Undertaker, 1997 was finally the year when he would transition from a ghoulish sideshow to a consistent main-event player. He was riding the momentum of his victories over Mankind and The Executioner, but there was one more giant roadblock that he would need to overcome: Big Van Vader. The former WCW champ, with the help of Faarooq's Nation of Domination, attacked Undertaker with two Vader Splashes during an edition of *Superstars*, leading to a grudge match between the two the following week.

Paul Bearer came to Vader's aid during that match, hitting Undertaker with the ever-present urn, enabling "The Mastodon" to execute a Vader bomb and score the three-count. Bearer announced Vader as his new protégé.

Undertaker beat Vader in subsequent matches while he watched the WWF World title bounce from Shawn Michaels to Bret Hart and then to "Sycho" Sid Vicious. This set up the first time that Undertaker would actually headline WrestleMania. And 'Taker came through in fine style, defeating Sid for his second WWF title at WrestleMania XIII.

The "Dead Man" was a dominant champion for the next five months, successfully defending his title against a list that included Mankind, Hunter Hearst Helmsley, Davey Boy Smith, Steve Austin, Savio Vega, and Faarooq. Undertaker lost the title to Bret Hart in controversial fashion at SummerSlam, with special referee Shawn Michaels reluctantly making the three-count despite the fact that he suspected—but had not actually witnessed—Hart of using a steel chair.

This led to bouts between Undertaker and Michaels, including the first Hell in a Cell match. In fact, Paul Bearer crashed the HIAC match near the end, introducing Kane—Undertaker's half-brother—to the WWF. Undertaker wouldn't be able to dispose of this foe very easily.

PWI Awards: Wrestler of the Year (second runner-up); Match of the Year (vs. Shawn Michaels, second runner-up)

GRADE: A+

Former WCW champ Vader more than met his match

1998

The Undertaker found himself in a blazing inferno at the WWF's first major event of the year, The Royal Rumble. It wasn't supposed to be this way. The Undertaker seemed to have reached an uneasy truce with half-brother Kane, and he was challenging Shawn Michaels for the World title in his specialty, a casket match. Everything was goingaccording to plan, with Undertaker executing a Tombstone piledriver on Michaels, sending the "Heartbreak Kid" into the casket, and then all hell broke loose. The New Age Outlaws and Los Boricuas rushed into the ring and attacked The Undertaker.

That's when Kane came charging to the ring, apparently to rescue his half-brother, but it was not to be. He choke-slammed Undertaker into the casket and Michaels promptly shut the lid and retained the WWF title. Then Kane poured gasoline onto the casket and lit it afire! When the fire was extinguished and the casket cracked open, The Undertaker was no longer there.

And, ironically, it was Michaels who suffered the most. During the match, HBK had landed awkwardly on the casket, rupturing two of his vertebrae and ultimately putting him out of wrestling for four years.

The WWF had teased an Undertaker-Kane showdown ever since the "Big Red Machine" had debuted the previous September, but didn't deliver until WrestleMania XIV. That was an extraordinary example of discipline and well-paced storytelling in the Attitude Era. And the fans got what they wanted: an Undertaker victory over the evil Kane.

The Undertaker-Kane saga took more bizarre twists, with Paul Bearer claiming he'd had an affair with Undertaker's "whorish" mother and fathered Kane, and The Undertaker burning Kane's arm in an Inferno match. This segued into Undertaker feuding with Mankind once again, resulting in the spectacular stunt that defined the Attitude Era: Undertaker pushing Mankind off the top of the Hell in a Cell and through the announcers' table.

In the latter part of 1998, The Undertaker's resentment of Steve Austin led him to actually join forces with Kane, then turn against Kane, rejoin Paul Bearer, and become the most devilish heel of all-time as the leader of The Ministry of Darkness.

PWI Awards: Match of the Year (vs. Mankind); Tag Team of the Year (with Kane, third runner-up)

GRADE: A

Photo by Mark W. Hill

Bloody but undaunted at WM X7 (2001)

1999

By the dawn of 1999, fans had witnessed Undertaker try to embalm Steve Austin alive and attempt to crucify him on a symbol during a live edition of *Raw*. Now committed to the Darkside, The Undertaker was the most dangerous force in the WWF.

The Undertaker amassed a cult of evil in the early months of '99. Bradshaw and Faarooq had become The Acoloytes. They abducted Dennis Knight (formerly known as Phineas Godwinn) and christened him "Midian." Mabel popped in some weird contacts and became Viscera. Then came the Brood, comprised of newcomers Gangrel, Edge, and Christian.

The Ministry of Darkness targeted WWF owner Vince McMahon and his Corporation. McMahon sent Kane after Undertaker, but 'Taker beat him in an Inferno match for the second time.

Undertaker's reign of terror continued. He hanged Big Bossman after their Hell in a Cell match at WrestleMania XV. After 'Mania, the Ministry kidnapped Stephanie McMahon. When Corporation member Ken Shamrock found Stephanie trembling in an arena boiler room, Undertaker retaliated by kidnapping Shamrock's sister, Ryan, and sacrificing her to his dreaded symbol. And the Ministry recaptured Stephanie by luring her to a limousine that was driven by none other than the "Dead Man."

Austin feels the power of UT's mighty forearm

Then things got weird. Undertaker found an ally in Shane McMahon, who had taken over The Corporation. That resulted in the most evil corporate merger of all-time, with Undertaker and Shane heading The Corporate Ministry. The Undertaker beat Steve Austin for his third WWF World title on May 23 at Over the Edge, thanks to a fast three-count by special referee Shane. After the match, Undertaker presented Austin to his "Higher Power," which turned out to be Vince himself!

Undertaker lost the belt to Austin on *Raw* a month later. And it seemed that not even the "Dead Man" could sustain the evil necessary to keep The Corporate Ministry together. It quietly disbanded and he took the 500-pound Big Show under the learning tree as his apprentice. Before long, a groin injury was enough for The Undertaker to fade from the scene.

The Undertaker was no role model in 1999, but he kept it mighty interesting.

PWI Awards: Most Hated (second runner-up)

GRADE: A

2000

Perhaps a headline that blared across the December 2000 issue of *PWI* said it best: "Does 'Taker Have Enough Gas In His Tank To Rumble To The Top?" The story pointed out that The Undertaker was very much a walking "Dead Man" in his last couple of years in the WWF, enduring a broken orbital bone, wrestling in several matches with what was probably a broken ankle, and trying to recover from a persistent groin injury that continuously postponed his return.

Big mistake!

Yet The Undertaker's burnout was as much mental as it was physical. Was his "Dead Man" character becoming passé as the Attitude Era came to a close? The Undertaker reinvented himself, revealing more of Mark Calaway than he ever had before. With strains of Kid Rock's "American Badass" accompanying him to the ring, The Undertaker returned at Judgment Day in May 2000, riding a hog and draped in the American flag.

The Undertaker targeted the McMahon-Helmsley Faction, allying himself with Kane and The Rock. He and Kane reunited as the Brothers of Destruction and would have captured the WWF tag title from Edge and Christian if not for Kurt Angle's interference. E&C even got a taste of Undertaker's new finisher, the Last Ride power bomb.

The feud with Angle escalated, however, when the Olympian had the audacity to pour milk all over Undertaker's custom-designed Harley-Davidson. His relationship with his brother, meanwhile, took a downturn when Kane interfered in Undertaker's match with Chris Benoit, choke-slamming him twice, the second time through the ring.

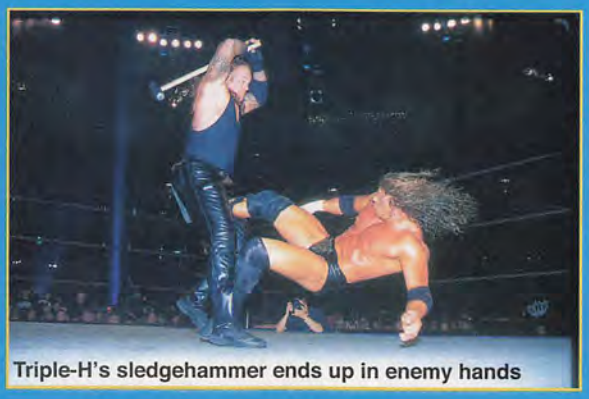
Undertaker was then forced into a two-month hiatus due to gall bladder surgery, but targeted new WWF champ Kurt Angle upon his return. Although he didn't win the title, he did make the highlight reel in a six-way Hell in a Cell match at the end of the year, choke-slamming Rikishi off the top of the cell and onto the back of a truck parked below.

GRADE: A

2001

The "American Badass" was out to make 2001 his most devastating year ever, and he arguably accomplished that goal. The Undertaker reunited with Kane *again* as the Brothers of Destruction and went on a rampage through the WWF, dominating Haku and Rikishi, Edge and Christian, and even tag champs The Dudley Boyz.

Then Undertaker heard Triple-H bragging that he had beaten everyone in the WWF. Not quite. 'Taker pointed out that "The Game" had never defeated the "biggest dog in the yard." Yet even Undertaker was unprepared for how low HHH would go. Undertaker could have forgiven Triple-H for hitting him in the head with a sledgehammer. Triple-H committed an unforgivable sin, however, when he pushed Undertaker's motorcycle off a stage.



Triple-H's sledgehammer ends up in enemy hands

The Undertaker was hell-bent for revenge at WrestleMania X7, and he got it. He absorbed Pedigrees and delivered Tombstones, and evaded sledgehammers and pummeled Triple-H with his big hambones. He "went medieval on Triple-H's ass," leaving him a crumpled heap in Houston.

Then came the questionable stalker storyline, with Dallas Page eventually being revealed as the stalker of Undertaker's wife, Sara. Their feud in the spring and summer of 2001 served as a prelude to the ill-fated WCW invasion angle, and eventually led to WCW tag champs Undertaker and Kane defeating WWF tag champs Page and Chris Kanyon to become the first unified tag team champions in 40 years.

But the entire invasion storyline left Undertaker a bitter man, as he was complaining about a lack of respect by year's end. He soothed his hurt feelings by attacking Rob Van Dam, Jim Ross, Spike Dudley, The Hardy Boyz, and even Lita.

The "American Badass" had gone off-track.

PWI Awards: Tag Team of the Year (with Kane, first runner-up)

GRADE: A-

2002

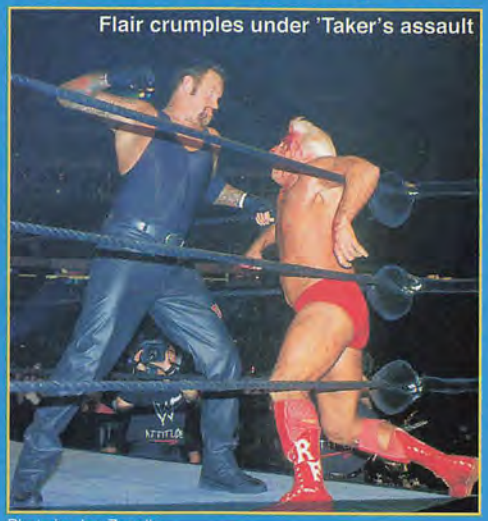
The Undertaker had a mythic persona, a larger-than-life aura, and perhaps the greatest gimmick of all-time. He was a two-time World champion. He was the implementer of a "Decade Of Destruction." What was the problem?

Perhaps Undertaker's new bad attitude was based on his insecurities about his fighting skills. Undertaker had always been a boxing fan and was becoming more enthralled by MMA. The Spoiler was tough, but he was no Royce Gracie.

Undertaker toned down his "American Badass" gimmick, cut his hair, and adopted the nickname "Big Evil." He began using submission-based holds such as the dragon sleeper, the Fujiwara armbar, and the Hell's Gate triangle. He also incorporated into his repertoire more striking moves, including jabs to the head and kicks to the legs.

The legendary Ric Flair was the unfortunate opponent of the new and improved Undertaker at WrestleMania X8. But the 53-year-old Flair amazingly rose to the occasion, and his match with 'Taker was a show-stealer, second only to The Rock vs. Hulk Hogan on the same card. In the end, though, Undertaker beat a very bloody "Nature Boy" for another 'Mania victory.

Undertaker's momentum continued, with "Big Evil" defeating Hulk Hogan for his third WWE World title in May, just over a decade after Undertaker had upset Hogan for the belt at Survivor Series '91. He served as undisputed champion as WWE underwent its brand extension, appearing on both *Raw* and *Smackdown*. After Undertaker lost the belt to The Rock in a three-way also involving Kurt Angle in July, he became the cornerstone of the Smackdown brand. He feuded with Brock Lesnar for a couple of months and took another hiatus after losing to the future UFC champ in a Hell in a Cell match in October.



Flair crumples under 'Taker's assault

Photo by Joe Zanolle

PWI Awards: Wrestler of the Year (third runner-up)

GRADE: A+

All-American badass (2002)

2003

With The Undertaker taking sabbaticals with increasing frequency, WWE Creative was becoming clever enough to prepare for Undertaker's returns with ready-made storylines. This time around, The Big Show had bodyslammed Undertaker off the stage before his departure. The psychological games were in full gear in the weeks leading to The Royal Rumble, where Undertaker returned as the 30th entrant. He eliminated everyone in sight, including Batista and half-brother Kane.

Batista was unhappy about being eliminated and distracted Undertaker, prompting Brock Lesnar to knock him over the top rope. 'Taker congratulated Lesnar in a show of respect.

But The Undertaker didn't respect Paul Heyman, who had developed quite a sphere of influence on the Smackdown brand. Heyman sent The Big Show and A-Train after him, and it looked as if Undertaker would be teaming with Nathan Jones to face Heyman's flunkies at WrestleMania XIX. But Jones was attacked backstage, leaving Undertaker to face Big Show and A-Train alone. Jones did make his presence felt, however, taking out Show with a roundhouse kick, enabling Undertaker to plant A-Train with the Tombstone piledriver for the win. His WrestleMania win-loss record stood at 11-0.

Undertaker finished off that feud in a series of rematches, and spent the summer beating on a young punk named John Cena, culminating in Undertaker taking Cena on the Last Ride at Vengeance. Undertaker was then met with a series of frustrations, including being screwed out of the WWE title twice against champions Kurt Angle and Brock Lesnar.

"Big Evil" correctly blamed Vince McMahon for working against him, and he beat the WWE chairman to a bloody pulp in a Buried Alive match at Survivor Series. But that match saw the surprise return of Kane, who ambushed Undertaker, pushed him into the hole, and shoveled dirt on top of him. Was Undertaker's career finally dead?

GRADE: B

UT wins the battle of chokeslams

2004

Kane was haunted by the prospect of The Undertaker's return. Mysterious promos, flashing lights, and sounds of thunder plagued the "Big Red Machine" at The Royal Rumble and several other televised events. Still, no Undertaker, not at the Rumble and not at No Way Out. Then word came via Paul Bearer: The Undertaker would face Kane at WrestleMania XX in what would be their highest-profile match since 'Mania XIV.

Appropriately, the theme of WrestleMania XX in Madison Square Garden was "Where It All Begins Again," and Undertaker returned to his "Dead Man" persona for the first time in four years. More methodical maneuvering than mat masterpiece, the Undertaker-Kane match was complete with dueling chokeslams and Tombstones and still thrilled the fans.

Soon after 'Mania, Paul Heyman commanded The Dudley Boyz to abduct Paul Bearer and the mystical urn. "Oh, *yeeees*," old-school had returned to WWE.

When Undertaker faced The Dudley Boyz at The Great American Bash, Heyman warned Undertaker to "do the right thing" or Bearer, who was imprisoned in a glass booth, would be buried in two tons of wet cement. As Undertaker neared victory and Heyman motioned to pull the lever, 'Taker sent a lightning bolt toward him and Heyman fled the scene. Undertaker made his way over to his screaming mentor, and, shockingly, pulled the lever himself, eliminating his only weakness.

Fortunately, wwe.com reported that Bearer escaped with only minor injuries.

Undertaker was rewarded with a shot at WWE champ John Bradshaw Layfield at SummerSlam. 'Taker was disqualified for hitting JBL with the WWE title belt, but he used the Last Ride to send him through the moonroof of his limousine.

Feuds with Booker T and Heidenreich burdened 'Taker for the rest of the year as he hoped for an elusive fifth WWE title reign.

GRADE: A-

2005

Weak competition, nagging injuries, and questionable storylines combined to make it a below-average year for The Undertaker, but the ascension of a third-generation star provided him with some great matches, salvaging 2005 from becoming a complete failure.

The Undertaker feuded with Heidenreich and Snitsky to start the year, and, despite Snitsky's interference, Undertaker defeated Heidenreich in a casket match at The Royal Rumble. Following the Rumble, The Undertaker participated in a tournament to determine the top contender to the WWE title, but his match against Rene Dupree went to a double-countout in the opening round, thanks to interference by Kurt Angle's henchmen, Mark Jindrak and Luther Reigns. This led to a match against Reigns at No Way Out, which Undertaker won convincingly.

As Undertaker found out, attempts to elevate talent sometimes backfire, but that didn't happen in his feud with Randy Orton. The "Legend-Killer" had gained so much momentum that fans believed Undertaker's WrestleMania undefeated streak was in jeopardy. And despite the interference of Randy's father, Bob Orton Jr., Undertaker kicked out of the RKO and used a Tombstone piledriver to extend his record to 13-0.

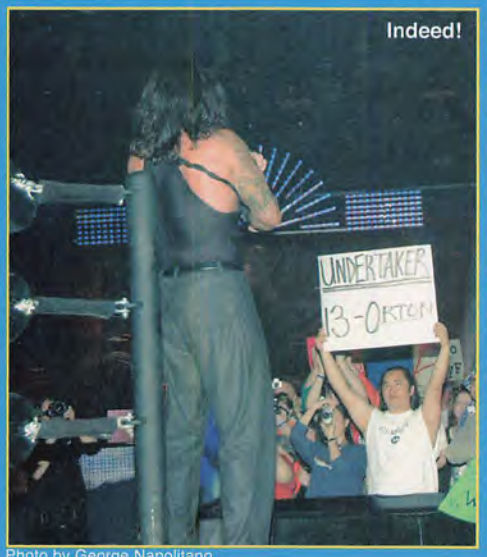


Photo by George Napolitano

Undertaker's feud with Orton would have resumed, but the third-generation star took some time off due to issues of his own. 'Taker turned his attention to the anti-American Muhammad Hassan, who—along with Daivari and five masked henchmen—responded with a terrorist assault, hanging the "Dead Man" with piano wire. This feud came to a merciful end with 'Taker beating Hassan at The Great American Bash.

Randy Orton returned to action that summer, and, with his dad's help, beat Undertaker at SummerSlam, re-igniting a violent feud that lasted for the remainder of the year.

GRADE: B

2006

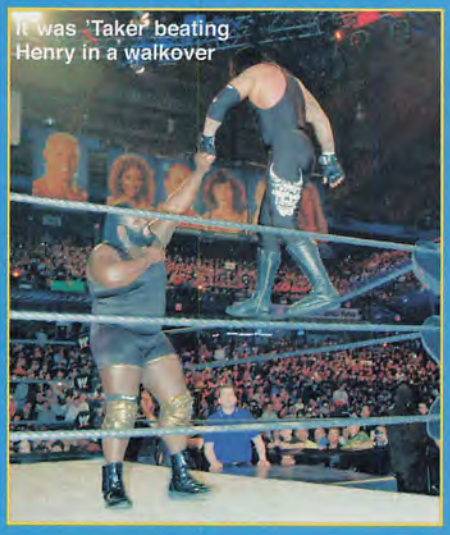
The secret to The Undertaker's success is that he strives to improve with age, from occasionally reinventing his character to adding the MMA dimension to his repertoire. The Undertaker proved that at No Way Out when he faced WWE champion Kurt Angle.

This all-time classic actually picked up the pace at the 23-minute mark when Angle snared Undertaker in the anklelock. Undertaker withstood the pain, yanked Angle toward him, and applied his triangle hold. Later, when Undertaker attempted a power bomb, Angle escaped and reapplied the anklelock. When Undertaker attempted a Tombstone piledriver, Angle slid out and reapplied the anklelock yet again.

It was that kind of match. Undertaker snared Angle with another Hell's Gate, but Angle contorted his body into a bridge and slid 'Taker down his back for a surprising pinfall.

Contrast that with Undertaker's match against Mark Henry at WrestleMania 22. It was back to the 1990s model of Undertaker slaying the monster, and one that wasn't even very convincing, in a casket match.

It got even worse from there. After the lackluster feud with Henry, Undertaker went straight for a showdown against The Great Khali. He even suffered a humiliating loss to Khali in what was essentially a squash match on *Smackdown*. Just as Undertaker and Khali were scheduled to face each other in a Punjabi Prison match, Khali discovered that he suffered from elevated liver enzymes, and The Big Show became Khali's last-minute substitute for the bloody battle in the bamboo cage.


It was 'Taker beating Henry in a walkover

The Undertaker soon reunited with Kane—*again!*—for a series of matches and engaged in an interesting rivalry with Mr. Kennedy that rounded out the year. Undertaker had regained his footing and was poised for 2007 to be a tremendous year.

PWI Awards: Match of the Year (vs. Kurt Angle, first runner-up)

GRADE: A-

A grand entrance (2004)

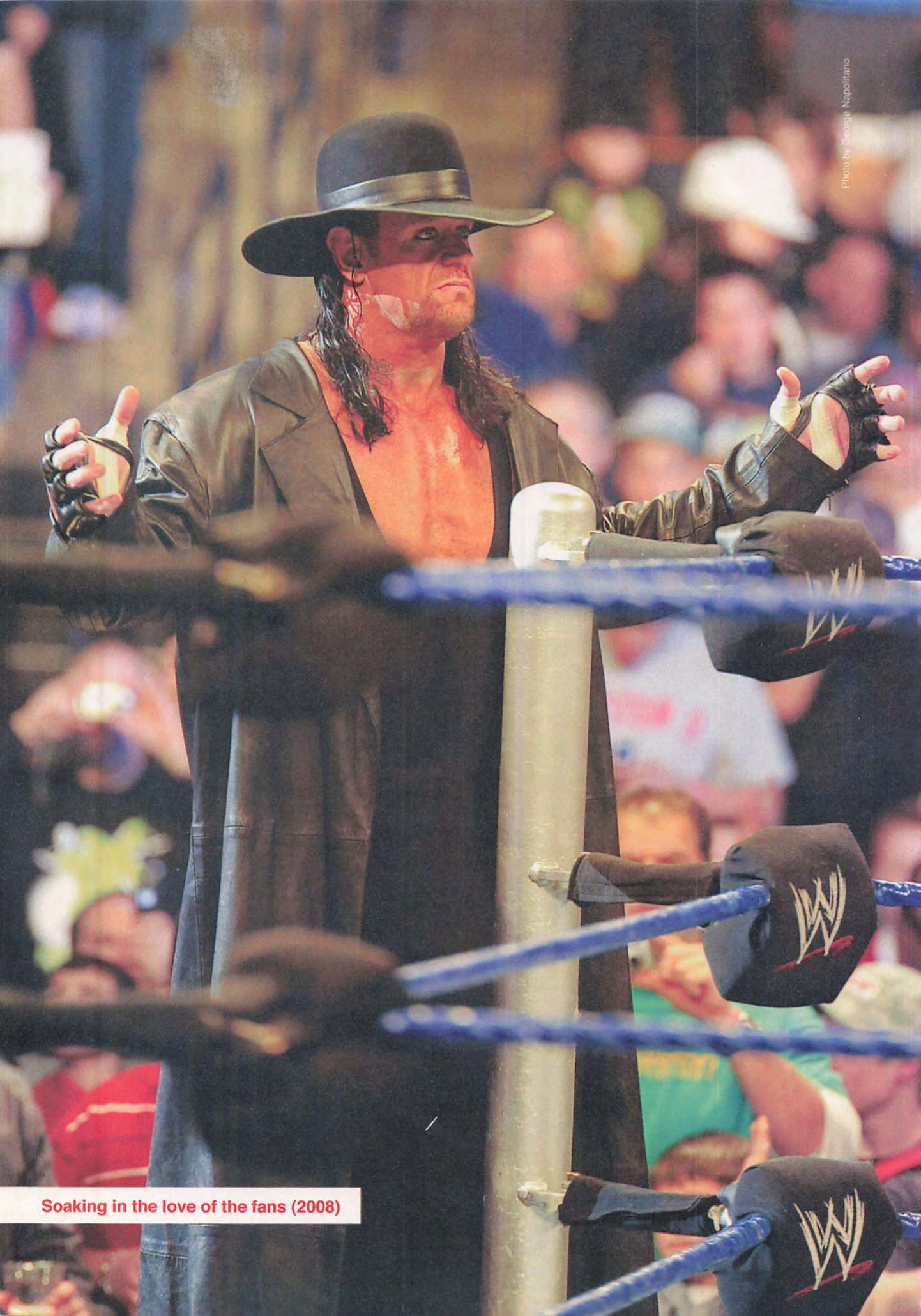


Photo by George Napolitano

Soaking in the love of the fans (2008)

2007

The year 2007 turned out to be an illustrious chapter in The Undertaker's career. Undertaker was in the midst of feuds with both Mr. Kennedy and World champion Batista, and those two were actually facing each other for the title at The Royal Rumble. But The Undertaker was determined to win the Rumble event itself so he could become the undisputed number-one contender to the championship. Undertaker and Shawn Michaels were the final two combatants in the ring when Michaels attempted a superkick, but 'Taker caught his foot and flipped him over the top rope. Batista, who had retained the World title against Kennedy at the Rumble, suspected that Undertaker would choose to face him at WrestleMania 23. He was right.

While Batista had been a solid fan favorite during his feud with Kennedy, he became a solid heel leading into his World title defense against Undertaker at WrestleMania. Unlike Kamala, Yokozuna, and Mark Henry, Batista didn't have a case of the spooks. He was more afraid of Undertaker the wrestler than of Undertaker the undead.

It turned out that he had good reason. "The Animal" power-bombed Undertaker through the announcers' table and even executed a Batista Bomb in the middle of the ring. Undertaker survived. He fought back against the onslaught and used a Tombstone piledriver to put Batista down for the pinfall and win the World heavyweight title.

Considering The Undertaker's momentum and performance at 'Mania, it was surprising that his title reign lasted only a month. He and Batista fought to a draw at Backlash, but Mark Henry stormed the ring and attacked Undertaker, leaving him ripe for Edge to cash in his Money in the Bank briefcase.

Batista is hit by a runaway Dead Man

Photo by George Napolitano

The ensuing time off allowed Undertaker to recover from accumulated injuries. He returned to feud with Mark Henry throughout the summer. But, when former champ Edge interfered to cost Undertaker the World title in a Hell in a Cell match against new champ Batista at Survivor Series, Undertaker vowed he would destroy "The Animal" and the "R-Rated Superstar" in 2008.

PWI Awards: Feud of the Year (vs. Batista, first runner-up), Most Popular (first runner-up)

GRADE: A+

2008

The Undertaker viewed the year 2008 as a do-over, the opportunity to once again win the World title, but also exhibit a bit more caution and remain injury-free. Although The Undertaker failed to win The Royal Rumble, he rebounded at No Way Out, where he won an Elimination Chamber match consisting of Smackdown and ECW stars to earn a shot at World champion Edge.

For the second consecutive year, The Undertaker would headline WrestleMania. And maybe WrestleMania 24 would also culminate with a World title victory. Edge had grown stronger politically since his last go-round with Undertaker, and he aligned himself with La Familia, comprised of Smackdown General Manager Vickie Guerrero, Chavo Guerrero Jr., Bam Neely, Curt Hawkins, and Zack Ryder. That wasn't the most formidable group of all-time, but Undertaker still found himself in a constant fight against the numbers game.

Edge is all choked up about losing the World title

Photo by George Napolitano

WrestleMania was no different. Undertaker had to fight off the "Edgeheads," Hawkins and Ryder, in addition to countering Edge's wily high-impact offense. But, as was always the case at WrestleMania, Edge was proven mortal at the hands of the "Dead Man," and Undertaker emerged with the World heavyweight championship.

The Undertaker won the subsequent rematch at Backlash—or so it seemed. Undertaker had used his new Hell's Gate finishing hold, the gogoplata, to force Edge into submission, but, later, GM Vickie Guerrero reminded fans that she had deemed the Hell's Gate to be illegal and stripped Undertaker of the title.

The years 2007 and 2008 would share a common theme: great momentum and a sensational headlining title victory at 'Mania, only to be spoiled by bizarre circumstances within a month. The Undertaker waged war with La Familia for the rest of the year.

PWI Awards: Match of the Year (vs. Edge, second runner-up); Feud of the Year (second runner-up); Most Popular (third runner-up)

GRADE: A

Perfect resting place for the World belt (2009)

2009

Both The Undertaker and Shawn Michaels had something to prove in early-2009. Undertaker made it to the final four of The Royal Rumble, but an interfering Big Show stole victory from his grasp. Michaels was being humiliated as John Bradshaw Layfield's "employee." Triple-H pinned The Undertaker to win the WWE title in the Elimination Chamber at No Way Out. Michaels then won his emancipation from JBL. And whispers of retirement plagued both UT and HBK.

As WrestleMania approached, many were reminded of The Undertaker's haunting comment to Michaels backstage at the Rumble. He said, "Sometimes it's Hell getting to Heaven."

So the two were booked to meet at WrestleMania 25. Undertaker found that only Michaels was in his league when it came to mind games, but nothing was going to rattle 'Taker. Both men put everything they had into their match at 'Mania, with Undertaker letting loose with a suicide dive and landing awkwardly, nearly breaking his neck. Then Michaels kicked out after a Tombstone piledriver. Michaels made a fatal mistake when he launched himself backward off the top turnbuckle, only to be caught upside down by The Undertaker—the perfect setup for another Tombstone.

Three beats of the mat later, Undertaker had extended his WrestleMania undefeated streak to 16-0.

The Undertaker renewed a brief feud with The Big Show and then went on a four-month hiatus. The Undertaker wasted no time in targeting the World championship upon his return, attacking CM Punk immediately after his TLC victory over Jeff Hardy to win the title at SummerSlam. Undertaker defeated Punk for his third World title, his seventh WWE world title overall, at WWE's Hell in a Cell in an actual HIAC match.

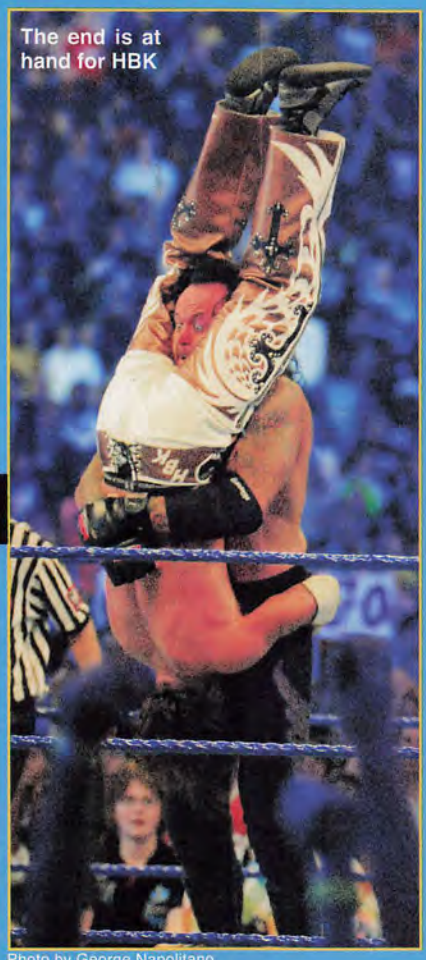

The end is at hand for HBK

Photo by George Napolitano

Undertaker successfully defended the title against Punk in several rematches and against Batista in a chairs match at December's pay-per-view, TLC.

PWI Awards: Match of the Year (vs. Shawn Michaels); Comeback of the Year (second runner-up); Most Popular (third runner-up)

GRADE: A+

2010

World champion The Undertaker rumbled into 2010 with a successful title defense against Rey Mysterio Jr. at The Royal Rumble and then onto WWE's Elimination Chamber pay-per-view ... where everything fell apart.

It must have been an omen when a pyrotechnics malfunction hurled a fireball into The Undertaker as he made his entrance. Kane must have been somewhere laughing as Undertaker frantically removed his smoldering black coat. He suffered second- and third-degree burns to his neck and chest, but still faced Mysterio, Chris Jericho, John Morrison, CM Punk, and R-Truth inside the Chamber. But Shawn Michaels interfered by super-kicking the "Dead Man" all the way to Hell, enabling Jericho to pin him for the title.

Michaels agreed to put up his career against Undertaker's streak at WrestleMania 26. Undertaker-Michaels II may well have surpassed their encounter the previous year, leading many to speculate that this was indeed the greatest 'Mania match of all-time. The result was the same, although it took two Tombstone piledrivers and a third *leaping* Tombstone to pin the "Heartbreak Kid" at 23:59 and extend his heralded streak to 18-0.

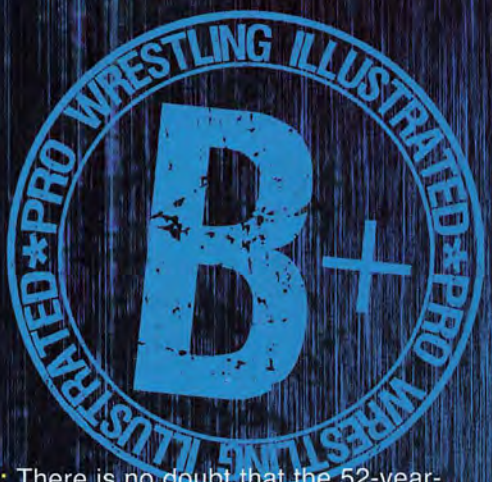
Then injuries began taking their toll on the 45-year-old "Phenom." Mysterio, of all competitors, roughed up Undertaker during a televised match on *Smackdown*, and 'Taker suffered a concussion, broke his nose, and re-broke his orbital bone. Undertaker returned several weeks later to renew his feud with Mysterio and Kane, but The Nexus attacked Undertaker during his Buried Alive match against Kane at Bragging Rights, once again sending the "Dead Man" into exile. This time, he had to undergo shoulder surgery.

Meanwhile, The Undertaker looked forward to 2011, another WrestleMania challenge, and the twilight of his career. He was the last outlaw, and a legend in his own time.

PWI Awards: Match of the Year (vs. Shawn Michaels)

GRADE: A

STING



GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Sting's legacy in the wrestling business has long since been secured. He has been able to set his own agenda for years, and has consistently remained a main-event or at least upper-midcard figure throughout his TNA tenure. Over the past year, his enthusiasm seemed to wane for a time. But after completing his TNA contract, he subsequently returned with a renewed sense of purpose. Shortly thereafter, he won his third TNA World championship.

GRADE: B+

MARKETABILITY: The four-time winner of *PWI's* Most Popular Wrestler award has always been one of TNA's biggest names. Even during his heel stints, he has remained immensely popular with the majority of fans, and his painted face has adorned many of the promotional materials for TNA pay-per-view events through the years. With his ascension back to the top of the mountain in TNA, Sting made a statement that he's going to remain a crucial part of the company's plans for as long as he wants to.

GRADE: A

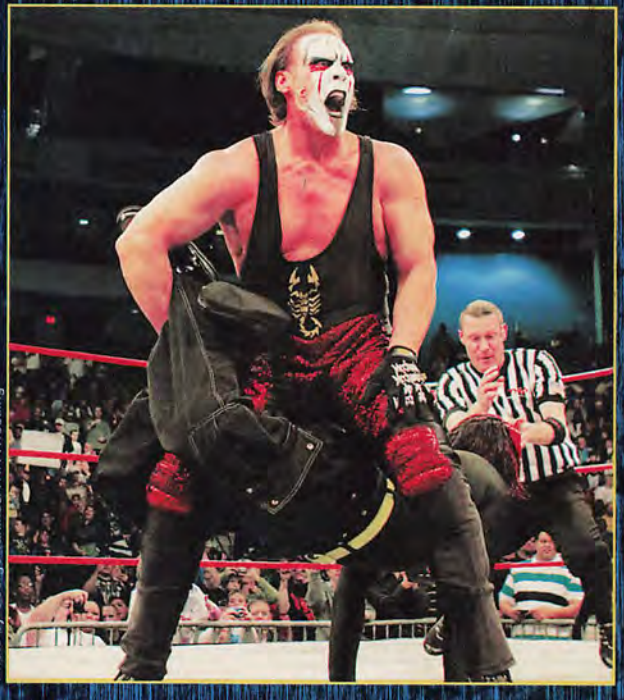


Photo by George Tahinos/TNA Wrestling

REPERTOIRE: There is no doubt that the 52-year-old has lost a step or two in the speed department from his WCW prime. But he has more than made up for it in savvy. Ever since he first got in touch with his darker side, Sting's mysterious comings and goings—and omnipresent baseball bat—have made him unpredictable and dangerous. Opponents have seen everything in Sting's repertoire, but that doesn't mean his foes are able to stop him. Once he cinches in the Scorpion Deathlock in the middle of the ring or catches an opponent in the Scorpion Deathdrop, the match is usually over.

GRADE: B+

CAREER GROWTH: When it comes to a wrestler like Sting, career growth is primarily measured by his ability to stay relevant with the fans, participate in memorable new storylines, and to deliver the goods in the ring and in promos when he is called upon by the company. There were some signs that Sting was losing his grip on his lofty perch during his overly convoluted feud with Hulk Hogan, Eric Bischoff, and Jeff Jarrett. More recently, he has elevated his game yet again to remove any doubts that he is still a force.

GRADE: B

OVERALL VALUE: Sting probably settled for less money in re-signing with TNA than if had he jumped to WWE, as was rumored. But he has long since made his fortune in the wrestling business, and he does make an enviable salary in TNA. More important, he is part of the backbone of TNA (as he was in WCW) and has a high degree of creative control over his persona. In WWE, he'd have had to make sacrifices on the creative side and would have to take on a more grueling travel schedule on a month-in and month-out basis. A big part of the reason why WWE wanted him so badly is that Sting is one of the few modern superstars who has never worked for Vince McMahon's company. But it is exactly that sense of independence that has made Sting such an intriguing figure in his post-WCW career.

GRADE: B+

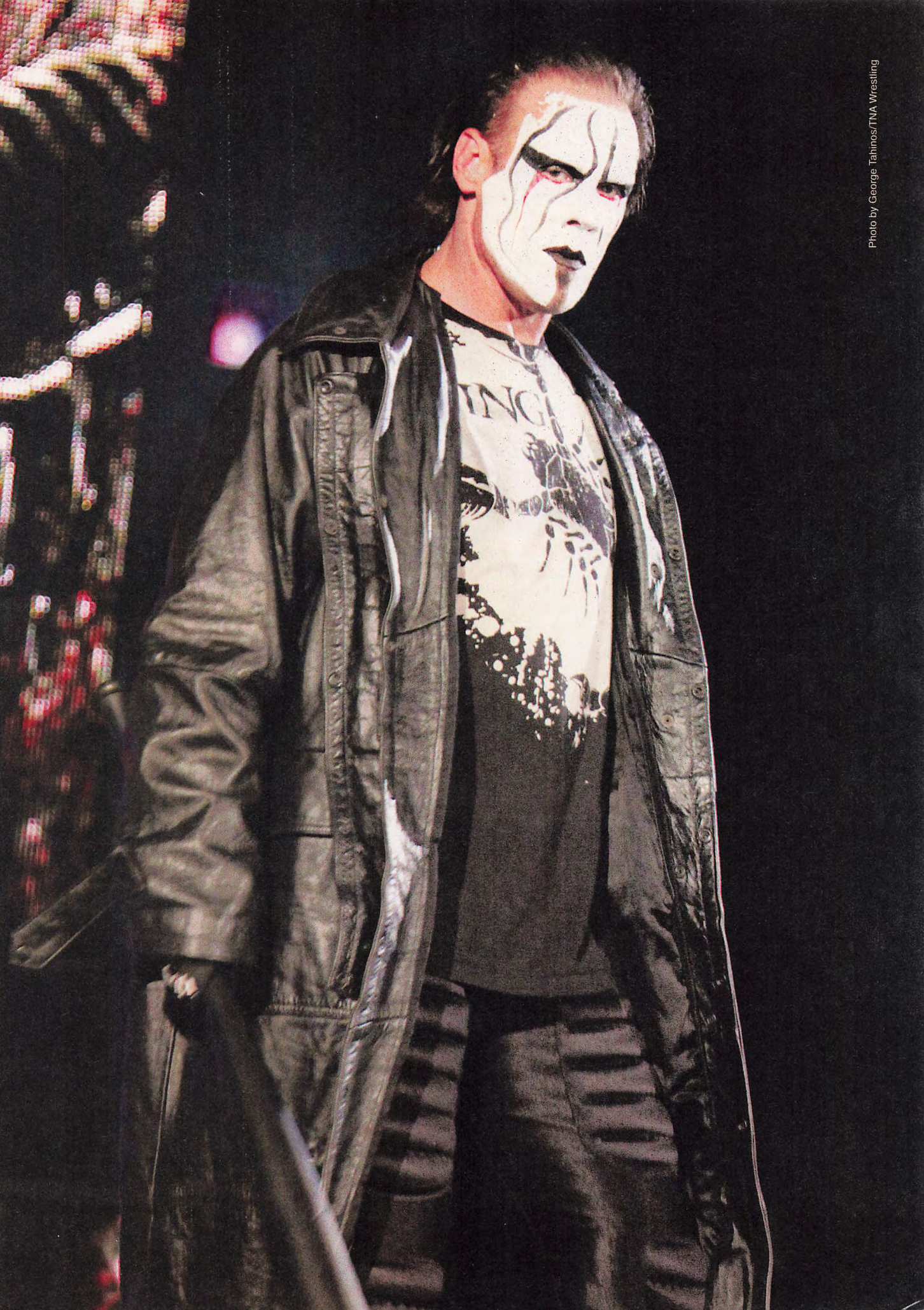
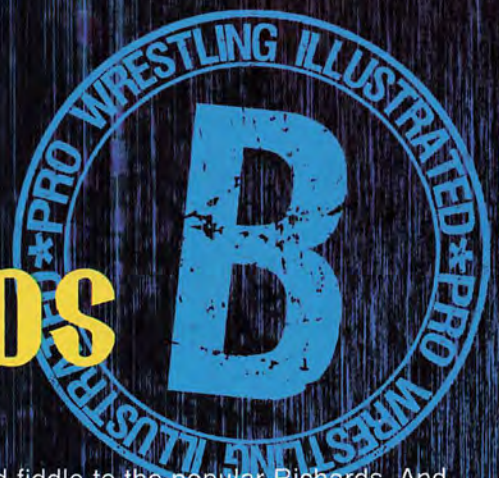


Photo by George Tahinos/TNA Wrestling

EDDIE EDWARDS



GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Edwards began the grading period as the first ROH TV champion, having defeated his partner Davey Richards in a tournament final match in March of 2010. As TV champ, he became a fixture on ROH's weekly television show on HDNet and successfully defended the title until dropping it to Christopher Daniels in December. Edwards would, no doubt, have liked to extend his title run, but since dropping the belt, he's become a top contender to the ROH heavyweight title.

GRADE: B+

MARKETABILITY: ROH hawks some pretty cool American Wolves gear, but little about Edwards' look, size, or charisma stands out as above average. At 6' and 214 pounds, Edwards' dimensions measure right in the middle of ROH's roster. And when it comes to promoting himself on the microphone, he's okay at best. One of the problems is that Edwards has yet to really define himself as a wrestling personality. In The American Wolves, he played second fiddle to the popular Richards. And in his solo career, he's done little to really set himself apart.

GRADE: B-

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

REPERTOIRE: There's no question that Edwards is a supremely talented professional wrestler. But, here again, it's tough to pin down what exactly makes Edwards unique when it comes to his wrestling game. He has some spectacular moves, like his Die Hard cross-legged fisherman buster. But his arsenal does not come together to form a wrestling style that is uniquely Edwards'. His most valuable tool in the ring may be his fighting heart—as evidenced by the time he competed in a ladder match with a broken arm, or demanded that his title defense against Daniels go into overtime when the match ended in a draw.

GRADE: B

CAREER GROWTH: The native Bostonian has come a long way since joining ROH four years ago as a junior member of Larry Sweeney's Sweet and Sour Inc. Right after coming off an eight-month reign as a tag team champion in The American Wolves, Edwards enjoyed a nine-month reign as TV champ. After losing that title, he quickly became number-one contender to the ROH heavyweight title. Edwards' steady rise through the ranks of ROH has been part hard work, part lucky breaks. The loss of some top talent in the company opened the door for him to raise his profile.

GRADE: A-

OVERALL VALUE: Although Edwards may not be the total package that ROH might dream of in a main-event act, he's the best of a dwindling number of options. With some big names having departed, and aging stars like Homicide and Daniels having returned, ROH is in need of a viable heavyweight title contender whom the fans see as young and fresh. Edwards has done more than enough to earn that spot.

GRADE: B

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

JEFF HARDY

PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED • PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED

B

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: The enigmatic one became the self-proclaimed "Antichrist" of professional wrestling, and two TNA World championships followed in short order. Hardy turned his back on his fans when he joined Immortal, but that move pushed him past the pack of contenders to the championship. He even got a new title belt designed for him. Hardy's in-ring accomplishments are even more impressive when you consider the legal woes he had faced outside the ring in connection to his arrest on drug trafficking charges. He has managed to thrive, despite those heavy distractions.

GRADE: A

MARKETABILITY: For the past several years, Hardy has been one of wrestling's most marketable commodities. He is a unique performer with an exciting ring style, good looks, and charisma. Joining Immortal cost him some fans and dinged his marketability a bit, but he still maintains a passionate core audience. His outside interests (including painting, making music, and producing podcasts) makes him a multifaceted artist/entertainer who can connect with fans on a variety of levels.

GRADE: A

REPERTOIRE: Once one of wrestling's most innovative high-risk artists, Hardy has adopted a slower, more conservative approach since joining Immortal. His offense now consists almost entirely of his Twist of Hate neckbreaker and Swanton bomb senton. He relies on outside interference and simple brawling. While he was never a submissions expert, even basic locks and wear-down holds have all but disappeared from his game plan. He has either become lazy since joining Immortal, or the years of bumps and bruises have begun to take their toll. He has clearly lost a step over the past year.

GRADE: C

CAREER GROWTH: Perhaps "growth" isn't the right word to use when describing Hardy's career over the past year. "Evolution" is more fitting. Last year at this time, he was TNA's most talked-about new acquisition, one of wrestling's most beloved stars debuting in Orlando after winning three WWE World titles. He won a pair of championships in TNA and became part of the company's top heel stable, but essentially became a pawn in the Hulk Hogan/Eric Bischoff coup attempt on Dixie Carter. He's still in the thick of the title hunt, but Hardy has lost all the buzz he had when he debuted in TNA. He's no longer a special attraction; he's just another wrestler contending for the TNA World title. He seems content and has embraced his new persona as the "Antichrist" of wrestling, but he has made little headway overall over the past year.

GRADE: C

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

OVERALL VALUE: Hardy's true value to TNA is questionable at this point. He provided a spark and pulled the trigger on the launch of the new Immortal at Bound for Glory, but his two title reigns proved to be mundane. With Kurt Angle, Rob Van Dam, Mr. Anderson, and so many others in line for title matches, Hardy has become just another contender. While his heel turn was shocking, it may have backfired. Instead of fans wanting to see Hardy get beaten, many casual fans seem to simply have lost interest in Hardy altogether. He's no longer anything special.

GRADE: B

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

KAZARIAN

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Kazarian has always been one of TNA's top pound-for-pound wrestlers, but he has struggled to break out of the X division and establish himself as a legitimate main-event player. Over the past year, he has found a way to do both. Kazarian recaptured the X division title and proved himself to be a fighting champion. He has also made it to the main-event level as a prominent member of Fortune. The 33-year-old still hasn't made an impact in the World title hunt, but he's finally graduating to the next level.

GRADE: B+

MARKETABILITY: If you want to talk model good looks, look no further than Kazarian. TNA's answer to Antonio Banderas is attractive, innovative, and exciting. He isn't one of wrestling's top talkers, but he has improved over the course of the past year, and he's hitting his stride as part of Fortune. On his own, Kazarian's marketability is limited, but as part of Fortune, he represents the future of TNA.

GRADE: B

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

REPERTOIRE: Kazarian's Flux Capacitor moonsault slam gets all of the attention, but it's his suplexes that deserve the credit for his success. He has an assortment of jarring suplexes in his bag, including an exploder belly-to-belly suplex, a snap cradle suplex, and a high-angle German suplex. With each of these suplex variations, Kazarian drives the oxygen from his opponents' lungs, causing them to fatigue more quickly. He smartly wears down opponents with stiff kicks and clotheslines, and uses proven wear-down holds like bodyscissors and neckbreakers to weaken opponents for the high-impact finisher. Kazarian balances a methodical offense with dynamic finishers. He has incredible balance and agility. His one weakness is the lack of a proven finisher that he can execute without needing lengthy wear-down moves.

GRADE: B+

CAREER GROWTH: Kazarian has taken a big step up the card, and he's faring well as a member of Fortune. He may have outgrown the X division title. Kazarian is ready for bigger and better challenges, such as feuds against Abyss, Matt Hardy, or Jeff Hardy. Being in the ring with TNA's top stars shows just how far he has come, but he still has to show he can defeat some of those top names.

GRADE: A-

OVERALL VALUE: Fortune has given Kazarian a *raison d'etre*. He has become a man with a mission, and that has given him the sense of confidence he has always lacked. Back in 2008, Kazarian left TNA because he felt he had disappointed his team by failing to win the World X Cup. That inability to win the international competition had haunted him, but Kazarian has finally gotten past that and realized that he can still become one of the true pillars of TNA. On his own, he is a talented and underrated X division expert. As part of Fortune, he becomes a modern-day Tully Blanchard—a solid utility man who can be the backbone of the group.

GRADE: B

KOFI KINGSTON

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Some people—maybe a lot of people—probably expected Kofi Kingston to at least seriously contend for the WWE or the World title over the past 12 months. Battling five others for the WWE championship inside the Elimination Chamber in February doesn't count as seriously contending. Those weren't necessarily fair expectations. Sometimes a slower climb to the top makes more sense. Who's to say he wasn't biding his time, gathering more experience and confidence in preparation for a big push in 2011 or 2012? He did wrestle on every WWE PPV in 2010. That made him a key player.

GRADE: B

MARKETABILITY: One step back in preparation for two steps forward? That may have been the goal when it was revealed that the Jamaican accent he brought with him to WWE was bogus, that he was really West African. It was fairly easy to market a Jamaican. Just your friendly, high-energy, fun-loving dude from the island, *mon*. Follow the stereotype. Someday, the story of a more serious high-flying world champ whose family comes from Ghana could be an interesting one for the company to tell. Right now his marketability is somewhat limited, but the possibilities are there.

GRADE: B-

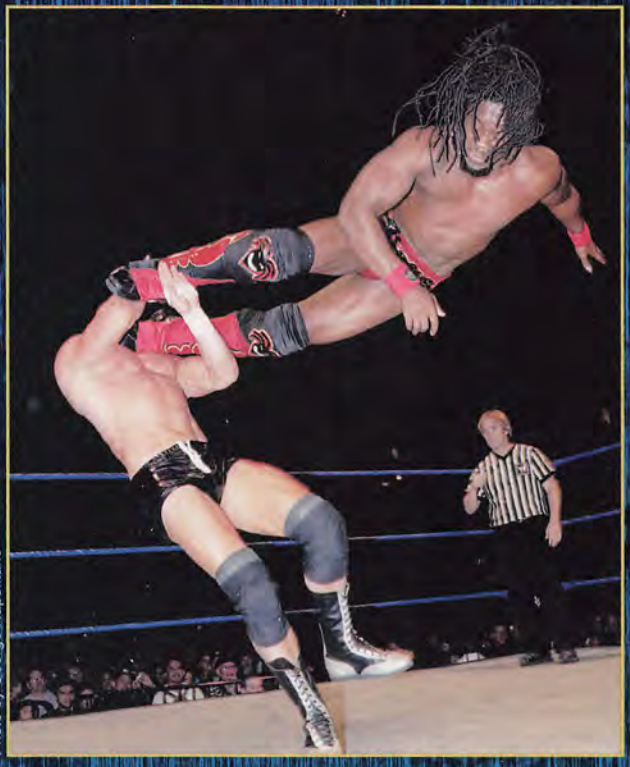


Photo by George Napolitano

REPERTOIRE: He has one of the more exciting move sets in WWE. If creative names for moves counted for anything, he might have a world title on his resume by now. Trouble in Paradise ... Boom Drop ... He didn't add significantly to that aerial attack over the past year, but he kept on executing everything crisply and with a lot of flair, and he rarely had a below-average performance. Just one additional power-based move might do a lot for him.

GRADE: B

CAREER GROWTH: "Deceptively disappointing" is how we would characterize the past year for Kingston. In some ways, it was a steady, solid, consistent year for him, but a closer look might change your perspective. He won his first Intercontinental title by beating Chris Jericho in 2008. By the end of 2009, he was in the midst of a furiously paced feud with Randy Orton. So 2010 was all about ... winning and defending the Intercontinental title again? He did capture it again in 2010, lost it, and worked fervently to regain it a third time (he finally did so in January 2011). That was nice, but bigger things could have been on the docket. That's the glass half-empty perspective.

GRADE: C

OVERALL VALUE: This was difficult to determine at the end of the grading period. It's tough to figure out if his chance to join the elite of the elite in WWE has come and gone, or if he merely had to step aside temporarily as WWE closely evaluated some of the other young talent. Unlike The Miz, Sheamus, and surprisingly even Dolph Ziggler, he has yet to get a shot at main-eventing for either brand. We still believe he has it in him.

GRADE: B

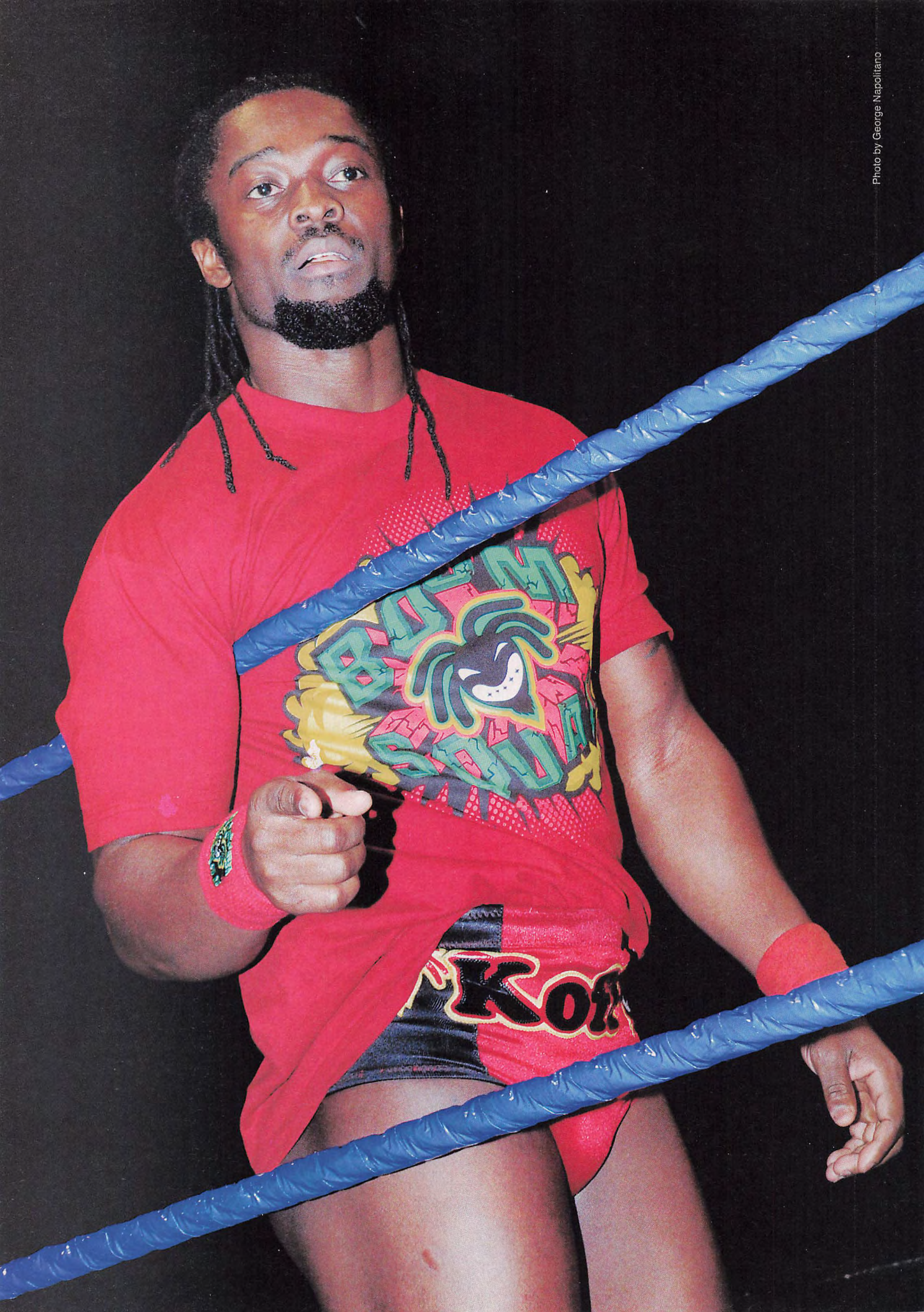
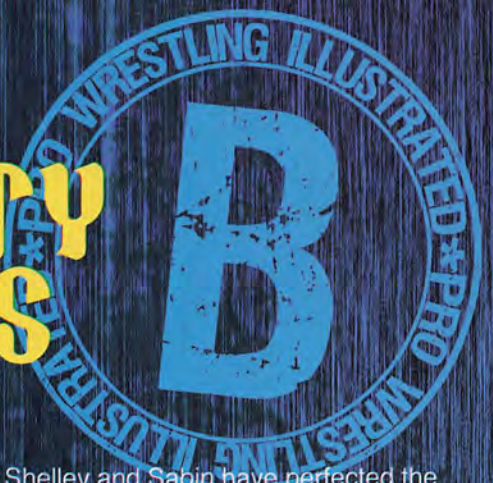


Photo by George Napolitano

THE MOTOR CITY MACHINE GUNS



GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: For the past five years, Alex Shelley and Chris Sabin have been one of wrestling's finest tag teams. In 2010, they finally got the monkey off their back and won the TNA tag team title. They also captured *PWI's* Achievement Award for Tag Team of the Year. But after dropping the belts, the Guns have slipped considerably, showing signs of dissension and struggling in matches against Generation Me. Beer Money has the belts, and now that Fortune have become fan favorites, James Storm and Robert Roode are focused on Gunner and Murphy and Immortal, leaving the Guns out in the cold.

GRADE: B+

MARKETABILITY: The Machine Guns are a popular team with widespread appeal. Their high-paced moves, unique double-teams, and innovative offense—combined with their too-cool-for-school attitude—made them cult favorites. Yet there is still a perception that Shelley and Sabin are mid-card players. Neither has had success against the company's top stars. Now that they no longer have the title belts, they are once again an opening act, albeit a popular one.

GRADE: B-

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

REPERTOIRE: Shelley and Sabin have perfected the art of the double-team. They strike quickly and precisely. They are constantly developing new well-timed attacks, combining quick tags, kicks, and high-impact slams. They rely on rhythm, but that rhythm can be easily disrupted. Once the Guns lose their rhythm, they are in trouble. To their credit, both men have proven their ability to absorb an incredible amount of punishment, but their entire offensive attack is based on timing and precision. One misstep can cost them a match. That's a major weakness.

GRADE: B

CAREER GROWTH: Winning the TNA tag title was a huge achievement. Successfully defending those belts against Beer Money and Team 3-D was even more impressive. But ever since they dropped the belts, Shelley and Sabin have struggled. Unless they can get back on the same page, there's a good chance that the team will break up. In any case, the 2010 Tag Team of the Year has slipped out of the rankings. After achieving their greatest success as a team, they are now experiencing their greatest challenge as a team. It remains to be seen whether they can overcome this challenge together.

GRADE: B

OVERALL VALUE: One of the ways that TNA has successfully differentiated itself from WWE has been the way it has featured the tag team division. The Motor City Machine Guns have been a vital part of TNA's tag team picture. They are a young, exciting team reminiscent of a classic team like The Rock 'n' Roll Express, The Rockers, and The Midnight Express. They have the potential to steal the show on any given night. But if the Guns are not firing together, or allow themselves to become pigeonholed as a pair of cruiserweights who cannot compete against the elite, they quickly lose value. The Guns *need* the tag team title. It gives them credibility and reinforces their claim of being the best tag team in wrestling. With the belts, they are invaluable. Without them, they are much more expendable.

GRADE: B

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

NATALYA

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: For the longest time, Natalya avoided singles competition in favor of managing The Hart Dynasty. She had to know that she could thrive in the Divas division. She had to yearn for a championship belt of her own. Instead, she guided Tyson Kidd and D.H. Smith to the Unified tag team title and sacrificed her own title hopes for the good of the team. When Kidd turned against Smith, it was the best thing that ever happened to Natalya. At the Survivor Series, Natalya beat Lay-Cool to win the Divas title. She dropped the belt in an upset two months later, but Natalya has proven that she is championship material.

GRADE: B+

MARKETABILITY: Natalya isn't likely to be confused with Eve Torres, Lay-Cool, or any of WWE's resident Divas. She is a second-generation wrestler who has been training for the ring since childhood. She is a member of the Hart Family, and that sets her apart from the pack. She is attractive, likeable, and is part of one of wrestling's most famous families.

GRADE: B

REPERTOIRE: Before joining WWE, Natalya traveled all over the world, facing a diverse variety of opponents. Her main asset is her power and low center of gravity, which gives her added power with forearms, clotheslines, and discus punches. It also allows her to set her weight back further when applying the Sharpshooter, adding more pressure to an opponent's hips and spinal cord. Her entire offensive game plan is built around attacking the back with suplexes, slams, and surfboards, before applying the Sharpshooter. She is a smart wrestler with vast experience and unparalleled counter-wrestling abilities.

GRADE: A+

CAREER GROWTH: Natalya took a big step forward by going out on her own and standing up to Lay-Cool. Her championship reign proved to be disappointingly brief, however. It is imperative for her to quickly regain the championship before the moment passes her by. With Eve Torres holding the Divas title, Natalya is in a difficult position. If she demands a title match against Eve, she risks losing her fans. If she waits too long, she risks slipping out of contention, behind Lay-Cool, Beth Phoenix, Melina, and others. She has made great strides in recent months, but her actions over the next few months will prove critical.

GRADE: B

OVERALL VALUE: Natalya is a solid all-around wrestler with a built-in fan base. She is an important part of the WWE Divas division, but she still has a way to go before she can be considered irreplaceable. She needs to develop more of a killer instinct and not allow others to dictate her future. She should avoid any temptation to go back to managing or subverting her own career for the good of others. If she can manage to do that, she could become the next Trish Stratus and become the centerpiece of the Divas division for years to come. She is not at that level yet, but she has potential.

GRADE: B

Photo By George Napolitano

Photo By George Napolitano

RANDY ORTON

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: After an impressive 2010, Randy Orton is slumping. He cut ties with Ted DiBiase Jr. and Cody Rhodes, and eventually won over the fans to become one of Raw's most popular stars. He managed to capture the WWE championship at Night of Champions, but he lost it just two months later when Miz cashed in his Money in the Bank shot. Orton has been unable to take the belt back from Miz and is now mired in a feud with CM Punk and The New Nexus. He's further from the WWE championship than he has been in years.

GRADE: C

MARKETABILITY: It took a little while for the fans to forgive Orton's past transgressions and fully embrace him, but he managed to win them over. He gets loud ovations and sells plenty of merchandise, but he's not a fan favorite in the traditional sense. Let's face it—we've seen Orton come unhinged many times before, and we expect him to do it again. Orton is capable of vile and sadistic attacks and moments of sheer rage and cruelty. He is popular now because he is fighting Punk and Nexus, but it's impossible to fully trust someone who calls himself "The Viper."

GRADE: B

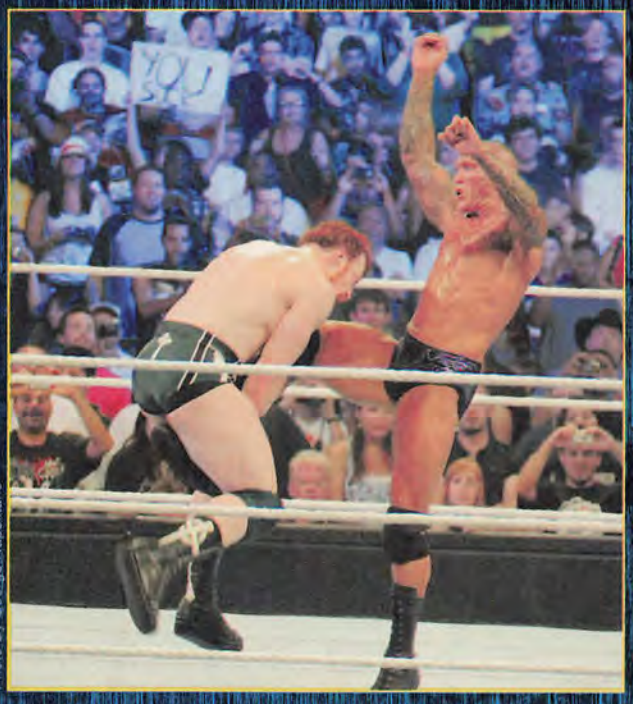


Photo By George Napolitano

REPERTOIRE: Orton is a master of positioning. He always manages to ground an opponent and immobilize him in the center of the ring while he wears him down with side headlocks and chinlocks. Orton is blessed with a lean and wiry physique that allows him to use his upper body weight for maximum leverage on basic wear-down holds for full efficiency. He offsets his methodical offense with explosive attacks, such as the RKO and side neckbreaker. Plus, his running punt and hanging DDT are dangerous moves that can end careers. Orton is a natural wrestler with superior fundamentals, ring generalship, and knockout power.

GRADE: A

CAREER GROWTH: Orton has made an uneasy trade-off. He has won over the fans, but he has not had the championship success he enjoyed as the leader of Legacy. For a man who hungers for championship gold, he has to be getting frustrated, especially after John Cena landed the WrestleMania title match against The Miz instead of him. Orton's frustration makes him a ticking time bomb that could go off at any moment.

GRADE: C

OVERALL VALUE: Orton is an unstable element. He has had periods of incredible success in WWE (such as his first World title run in 2004 and his Legacy reign of 2009), followed by periods of underachievement and disappointment. He seems to be at his best when he's playing by his own set of rules and not playing to the crowd. As a heel, he's a main-event title threat and one of wrestling's top stars. As a fan favorite, he's inconsistent. He has never been the ambassador for WWE that Cena or Triple-H have been, but when he's on top of his game, he's one of the most dynamic wrestlers in the business.

GRADE: B

Photo By Wayne McCarty

ADAM PEARCE

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: "Scrap Iron" experienced the highest of highs and lowest of lows over the past year. On the upside, his third reign as NWA heavyweight champion was his longest, lasting just short of a full year and featuring wins over such notable names as Charlie Haas and Daniel Bryan. He also got some added exposure on the new *NWA Championship Wrestling From Hollywood* television program. On the downside, he lost the NWA title in March to Colt Cabana. He also lost the job he loved most in wrestling when he was fired as booker of Ring of Honor in August.

GRADE: B

MARKETABILITY: Pearce prides himself on being a throwback to the great wrestling villains of the 1970s and early-'80s. While that may not make him too appealing to younger wrestling fans, it does make him a perfect fit as flagbearer for the National Wrestling Alliance, a promotion that prides itself on tradition. What's more, Pearce is simply one of the best talkers in the game, able to weave words into the kind of intense, believable promos that not only entertain fans, but also sell tickets.

GRADE: A

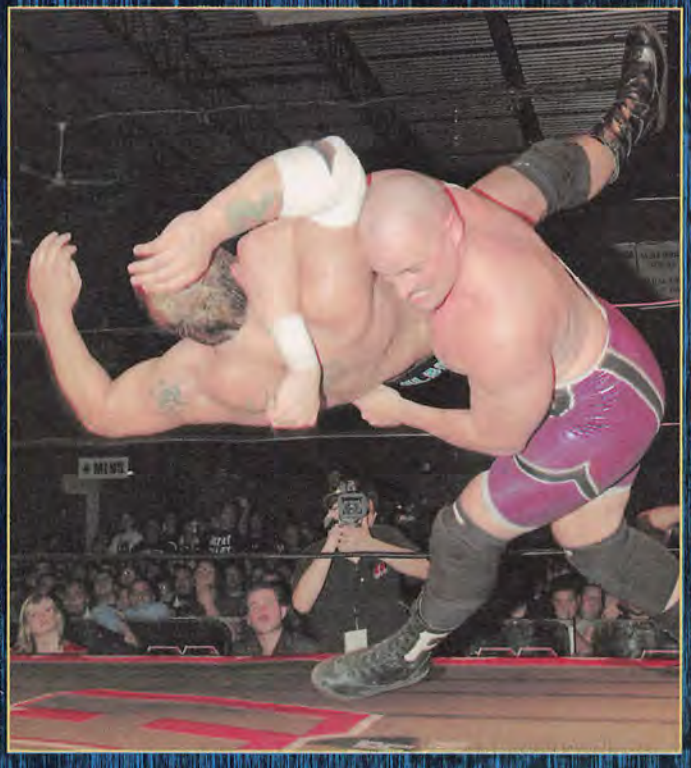


Photo by Joe Zanolle

REPERTOIRE: Like everything else about him, there is little that's flashy about Pearce's offense. That doesn't mean it's not effective. Pearce is a master of the fundamentals who understands that less can sometimes mean more. One of Pearce's vicious slaps to an opponent's face can do more damage and elicit more of a reaction from fans than a 450-degree splash. Still, after spending so much time in his office job in ROH, Pearce may have been a bit rusty when he returned to full-time competition in the NWA last year.

GRADE: B

CAREER GROWTH: Pearce will be the first one to tell you that he's passed up opportunities to go further in the sport so that he can do what he loves—make other wrestlers look good. Pearce, who once turned down a job in WCW, barely competed in ROH during the years he worked in management. In the NWA, most of his title defenses featured him being beaten up during most of a match before pulling out a victory by any means necessary. His methods may keep him from becoming a big star, but they've helped serve ROH and the NWA well.

GRADE: B-

OVERALL VALUE: Entering his mid-30s and with 15 years experience in the sport, Pearce's prime is probably behind him. But, as evidenced by his promos and his years in creative, Pearce is one of the brightest minds in the business. He knows how to make the most of every move and gesture in the ring, and is eager to pass that wisdom on to others. Those qualities have become rare in the sport, and will keep Pearce relevant for years to come.

GRADE: B

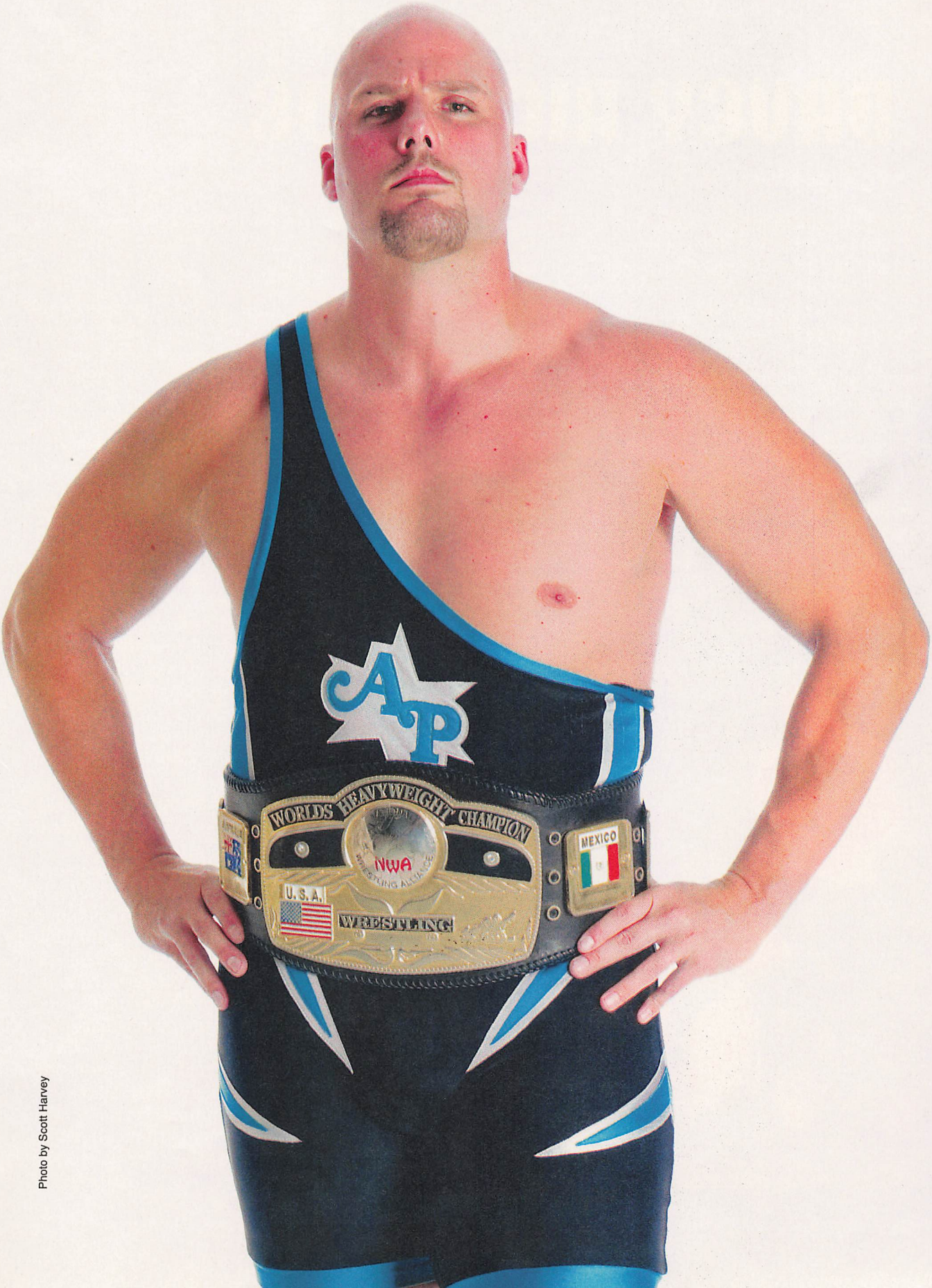
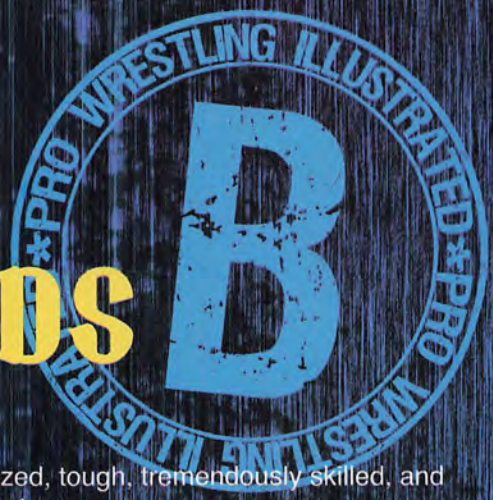


Photo by Scott Harvey

DAVEY RICHARDS



GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: When Richards chose to re-up his contract with Ring of Honor last fall, he did so with the sole mission of winning the ROH championship. For fans, it was the natural next step for Richards, who had grown to become arguably the most respected wrestler on the entire roster. So when Richards lost in his long-awaited title challenge with Roderick Strong at Final Battle, it was a significant setback. It's probably only a matter of time before Richards wins the ROH title, but it won't happen easily; Richards is nothing if not resilient.

GRADE: B

MARKETABILITY: Although small in stature at 5'8", Richards has enough going for him to make promoters look past his height—and maybe even embrace it as part of what makes him unique. The compact "American Wolf" has a chiseled physique and a fierce scowl that exudes legitimacy, as do his intense promos. Richards is the ideal poster boy for ROH—undersized, tough, tremendously skilled, and highly respected.

GRADE: A

REPERTOIRE: Although already considered by many fans as "the best in the world," Richards still trains with the determination of a rookie trying to break into the business. Richards is constantly trying to improve his game and expand his skills, through the incorporation of Japanese-inspired moves, Brazilian jiu jitsu, and other mixed martial arts disciplines. It combines for a wholly unique arsenal of kicks, submission holds, and dazzling aerial maneuvers.

GRADE: A

CAREER GROWTH: Richards has already come a long way from the days when he watched ROH DVDs in the living room of his grandparents' farmhouse in small Othello, Washington. At 28 years old and with just seven years' experience, Richards is already a former tag team champion with his American Wolves partner Eddie Edwards, and a top contender to the ROH championship. His flirtation with retirement last year may have derailed his progress a bit, but he's now back on track in a big way.

GRADE: B

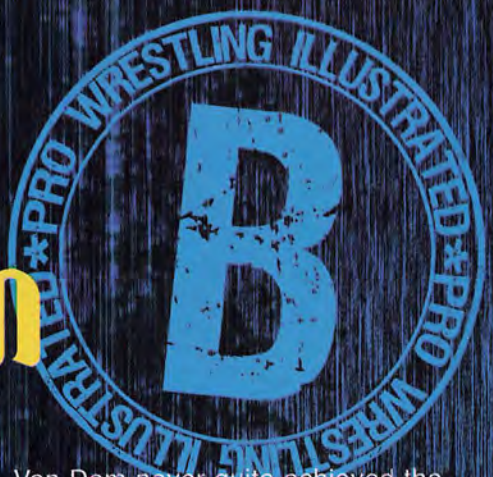
Photo by Scott Finkelstein

OVERALL VALUE: Having lost its television distributor, its longtime booker, and some of its top stars within the span of a few months, it's become essential that ROH hold on to Richards. Like Samoa Joe and Bryan Danielson before him, Richards is the latest ROH homegrown talent to be considered the best American wrestler yet to have signed with WWE or TNA. What's more, Richards has said that, after losing some of his passion for wrestling last year, he is now more committed to his ring career than ever before. That could only mean good things for ROH and its fans.

GRADE: B

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

ROB VAN DAM



GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: RVD's debut in TNA in 2010 set the tone for his year. He had a triumphant first appearance, defeating Sting in less than a minute … then he got the stuffing beaten out of him by a bat-wielding Sting for the next five minutes. That was Rob Van Dam's year: a taste of glory (winning the World title) followed by a horrendous beating. Abyss' animalistic attack put RVD out of action and forced him to vacate the title. Van Dam got vengeance on Abyss, but he has yet to regain the momentum he had last spring, when it looked like he was going to be TNA's knight in shining armor.

GRADE: B-

MARKETABILITY: RVD is one of the few remaining top stars from the Monday Night War era. Unlike many of his peers, Van Dam's lengthy sabbaticals have kept him fresh in the fans' eyes. He is not perceived as being an old-timer, even though he has been wrestling since 1990. He has name recognition, even among casual fans, and has a unique, cool charisma. Van Dam never quite achieved the popularity of The Rock, Steve Austin, or Triple-H, but he wasn't too far behind. He is certainly one of TNA's most bankable personalities.

GRADE: A

REPERTOIRE: If you compare an RVD match from 1998 against an RVD match from 2011, you will notice that very little has changed. Van Dam still has remarkable balance and flexibility, and wicked precision with his spin kicks and dives, but his move set is almost the exact same as it was then. Van Dam's game has not evolved. His Five-Star Frog Splash and Rolling Thunder splash are still working for him, but he's overdue to add some new elements to his game. Everything he does is based on timing, and an opponent who can offset that timing can throw a monkey wrench into RVD's rhythm and avoid his big moves. Van Dam still lacks a credible submission finisher, and he is still overly reliant on using a steel chair as a weapon.

GRADE: B

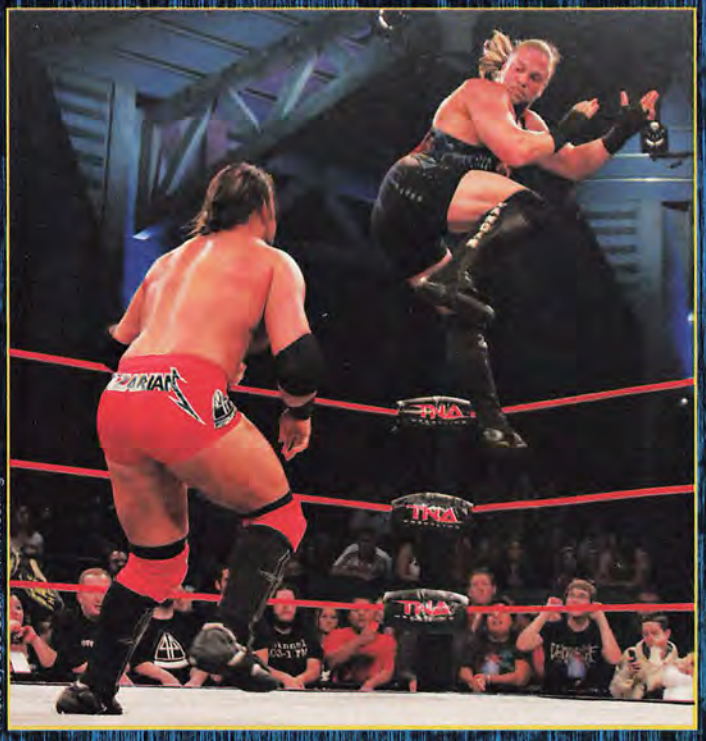


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

CAREER GROWTH: The biggest knock on RVD was that he lacked passion and a killer instinct. He was too laidback to be a world champion, the critics said. This is a perfect opportunity for Van Dam to prove the critics wrong. He suffered adversity and was robbed of the TNA title. Now it's time for him to get a bee in his bonnet and start demanding justice and an immediate title shot. If he decides to "go with the flow" once again, he will have cemented his legacy as a talented wrestler who never had the heart to be great. His legacy is on the line.

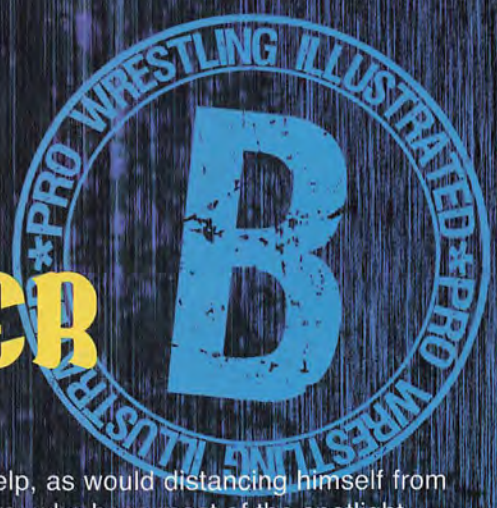
GRADE: B

OVERALL VALUE: Van Dam is a great asset to any locker room. He is popular, well-known, and a fantastic wrestler. He's a ratings draw and a proven PPV commodity. But if he's not in it for the long haul, or his motivation is lacking, RVD becomes expendable.

GRADE: B

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

DOLPH ZIGGLER



GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Dolph Ziggler, rising WWE star, is still Nick Nemeth away from the arena. He just doesn't want you to know that. For Mr. Ziggler, the past year was a lot about his continued quest to get all of us to forget (or at least not remember so vividly) that he was once Kerwin White's caddy and—*gulp!*—a Spirit Squad member. That's quite a stench to wash out of your tights. But he did damn well. He reigned for most of the second half of the year as Intercontinental champ and was on the verge of main-eventing on Smackdown by Christmas. He was certainly being taken seriously. Nick who?

GRADE: A

MARKETABILITY: There's no question that Ziggler has the look and charisma for WWE to market, but for some reason, it hasn't happened. At least the potential is there, though. Perhaps a more serious edge would help, as would distancing himself from Vickie Guerrero, who hogs most of the spotlight.

GRADE: C

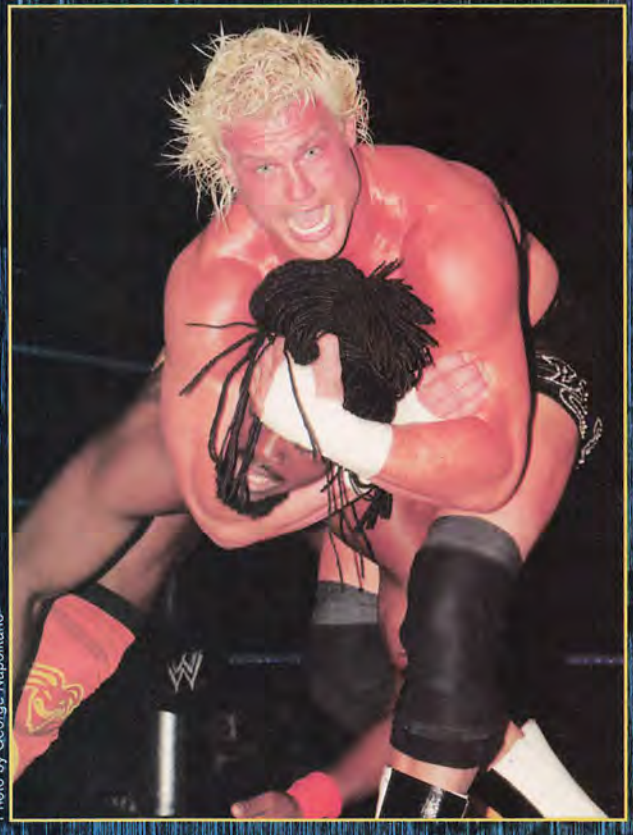


Photo by George Napolitano

REPERTOIRE: Ziggler has an outstanding amateur background (he once held the record for career wins at Kent State University) that is on display in many of his matches. He is clearly comfortable on the mat. However, despite his cockiness, he still seemed tentative at the opening bell in many of his big matches in 2010, too easily put on the defensive, and occasionally too willing to wait for Vickie Guerrero to help out. His approach tends to be conservative, as he uses kicks, neckbreakers, Billy Gunn's old Fameasser, and even incorporates a dull sleeperhold into his attacks regularly. He had some terrific bouts in 2010—Daniel Bryan and Kofi Kingston come to mind—but it looked like he needed his opponents to bring out the best in him, and not vice versa.

GRADE: B-

CAREER GROWTH: Who would have guessed just a few years ago that hooking up with Eddie Guerrero's widow could be such a boon to a young wrestler's career? Yep, meet Vickie Guerrero, potential star-maker. We could someday look back on that as the turning point in an outstanding career for Ziggler. To be frank, when WWE first introduced us to Dolph Ziggler, we didn't think the persona would work or last, but he made a steady move up the Smackdown card last year, and fans accepted him in a prominent role.

GRADE: B+

OVERALL VALUE: It certainly will be interesting to gauge Ziggler's overall value come the end of 2011. His career progressed significantly in 2010, setting him up for a trial run as a main-eventer. But he seemed a level below fellow young guns such as The Miz, Wade Barrett, Alberto Del Rio, and maybe even Sheamus. That's not exactly horrible, but WWE may not be entirely sold on him as a top-of-the-carder just yet.

GRADE: B

Photo by George Napolitano

D'ANGELO DINERO

B-

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Since arriving in TNA in mid-2009, "The Pope" has professed his desire to put gold around his waist. He has fallen short, however, in bids to capture both the World and TV titles. Worse yet, he has not recovered well enough to receive further championship opportunities. A lack of focus seems to have left Dinero at a crossroads. He also seems to have a penchant for getting needlessly involved in feuds that present no benefit to his chances of moving up in the rankings. It is telling that Mr. Anderson, who injured Dinero's shoulder and sidelined him for two months, vaulted right past him and eventually won the TNA title. Critics are still waiting for Dinero to exhibit a similar killer instinct. His recent heel turn might be exactly what he needs.

GRADE: C-

MARKETABILITY: Dinero oozes charisma, in and outside of the ring. When he talks, people listen ... though his message is sometimes lost amid his bizarre ramblings. When he's on his game, Dinero can captivate any audience and is a striking and unique character in a promotion that seems desperate to present a new star with just those qualities. He seems to possess that elusive, indefinable "it" factor, yet something is missing. Perhaps Dinero has simply not yet fully cultivated his persona. Between the ropes, he is a dynamic performer. Though not blessed with size, he is a "solid" 6', 220-pounder with a good presence who knows how to work a crowd and elicit their emotions, although that hasn't exactly translated into selling a ton of merchandise.

GRADE: B

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

REPERTOIRE: Though Dinero's style is often referred to as unorthodox, it is merely a product of his natural athleticism and background. A former amateur boxer (with an unsubstantiated record of 98-1), the Jacksonville, Florida, native utilizes a strike-based offense to set up his attack. An improving grappler, he continues to add moves to his arsenal, and has shown a fondness for suplex variations. Though he relies upon his uncanny speed and quickness, and will occasionally take to the air, Dinero does not wrestle like a cruiserweight. Often to his detriment, he will attempt to slug it out with much larger opponents.

GRADE: B

CAREER GROWTH: After a fast start in TNA, Dinero appeared to be destined to become a fixture in the company's main-event scene. But he seemed to peak after he fell short against then-TNA champion AJ Styles at Lockdown, having earned the shot by winning the Eight-Card Stud Tournament. Shortly after, he was injured by Anderson and has yet to regain his footing. Perhaps out of desperation, Dinero more recently turned on the fans and raised the ire of Samoa Joe, for which he earned a muscle-buster through a table. The fans were a driving force behind his early success in TNA; Dinero now must figure out a way to right his ship on his own.

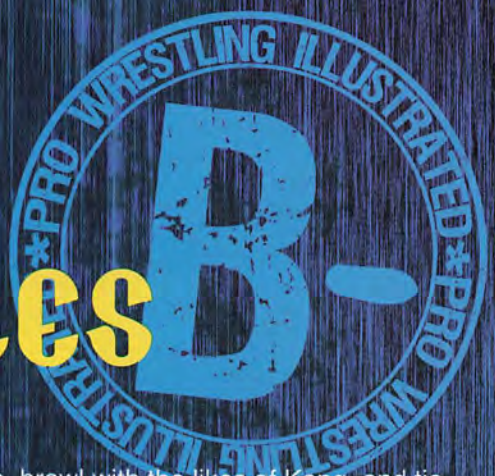
GRADE: C

OVERALL VALUE: Going back to his days as a member of WWE's ECW brand as Elijah Burke, Dinero's name has always been associated with that sometimes-detrimental term: potential. On the surface, he seems to have a great deal going for him. He has the look, the undeniable talent, the in-ring ability, and, surely, the mike skills to set himself apart from the pack. But, somewhere along the line, his contendership status in TNA got derailed. The shoulder injury could not have come at a worse time, but he also failed to capitalize on the momentum of his return. Regardless, Dinero remains, at worst, an established mid-carder who can be a real asset to TNA if he asserts himself and is showcased properly.

GRADE: B-

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

MADISON EAGLES



GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: The towering Australian shocked the world last year when she knocked off MsChif, ending the emerald one's two-year SHIMMER championship reign. Already an established star in her native Australia, Eagles has had several successful tours of the United States. In many ways, Eagles is still an unknown commodity on these shores. She has competed in relatively few singles matches against top-tier American women. It's still too soon to tell if her victory over MsChif was a fluke or if Eagles is the real deal. But Eagles succeeded where Mercedes Martinez, Cheerleader Melissa, Amazing Kong, and so many other women failed and knocked off MsChif, which is pretty darn impressive.

GRADE: A+

MARKETABILITY: Eagles doesn't have much name recognition in the U.S. She hasn't appeared on national television in the U.S. She is still based in Australia and only makes occasional tours in the States. American audiences are just starting to warm up to her.

GRADE: C

REPERTOIRE: This is an area where Eagles excels. Standing 6' tall, she has a decided height advantage against most opponents. She can also fly off the top rope, brawl with the likes of Kong, and tie most opponents up in knots. Her height gives her added leverage when executing moves like the rolling suplex. The length of her limbs provides an added snap when she connects with a lariat or shining wizard knee strike. She's as adept at striking as she is at grappling, and she has the power and presence to outclass most of her opponents.

GRADE: A+

CAREER GROWTH: Winning the SHIMMER title was a huge achievement for Eagles, but it's difficult to imagine her holding on to that title for a long time. The flight back and forth to Australia is grueling. It's hard to imagine Eagles managing to continue to make frequent tours between the two countries and continue to compete at an elite level. Eventually, fatigue will take its toll. If she decides to relocate to the United States and pursue her career in America, Eagles could very well develop into one of the all-time greats. If she continues her current schedule, she is likely to lose the SHIMMER title in the near future.

GRADE: B

OVERALL VALUE: Eagles is a boon for SHIMMER for several reasons. She is an example of the great international competition the all-women's promotion has been able to draw. She is a talented wrestler who is capable of producing great matches against a variety of competition. She also has the benefit of not having wrestled many of SHIMMER's top females previously, so potential matches against Allison Danger, LuFisto, Mercedes Martinez, and others are fresh and intriguing. On the other hand, Eagles does little to promote SHIMMER in the U.S. while she's at home in Australia, and bringing her halfway around the globe for title defenses could be a logistical nightmare for SHIMMER matchmakers.

GRADE: B-

Photo by George Tahinos

Photo by George Tahinos

MADISON RAYNE

B-

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: As of this writing, TNA's resident "Queen Bee" has held the Knockouts title for more than four months and can boast the third longest title reign in Knockouts history (behind Awesome Kong's two reigns). She is a three-time Knockouts champion and has established herself as the most dominant woman in TNA. She has come a long way from the days when she was the black sheep of The Beautiful People. Her methods have been questionable, but you can't argue with success.

GRADE: A

MARKETABILITY: Despite her title success, Rayne is not one of TNA's most featured female performers. The Beautiful People still get a more prominent billing, and former WWE competitors like Tara and Mickie James capture the bulk of the headlines. Rayne has thrived in that position, but she is one of the least marketable women in a very crowded Knockouts division.

GRADE: C-

REPERTOIRE: For all her confidence, Rayne has a tendency to get into trouble early in a match and is forced to rely on a desperation reversal to turn the momentum to her favor. Her wear-down moves, such as forearm smashes and hair pulls, are usually very basic. Her roll-over head scissor facebreaker is damaging, as is her version of the lung-blower backbreaker, but she spends an exorbitant amount of time playing to the audience instead of going for the win. The most effective finisher in her arsenal isn't the Rayne Drop—it's her loaded glove or outside interference from Tara. Without those two weapons, her title reign would have ended long ago.

GRADE: C

CAREER GROWTH: It wasn't that long ago that Rayne was carrying Angelina Love's bags. Rayne managed to usurp Love as the leader of The Beautiful People, then broke away and has had great success on her own. Rayne can boast victories over Love, Tara, Mickie James, ODB, and Roxxi, which is a very impressive record. She has overachieved and been an impressive Knockouts champion. She has to be considered an early favorite for the top spot in the 2011 "*PWI* Female 50."

GRADE: A

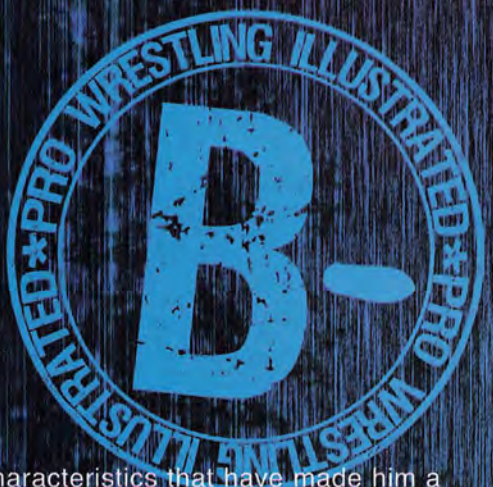
OVERALL VALUE: Rayne has been one of TNA's most successful Knockouts of the past few years, but she is not bigger than the Knockouts division. Despite her success, she is still not featured as prominently as The Beautiful People and Mickie James, and she clearly is becoming frustrated by that fact. Rayne recently issued an open challenge and is wrestling any woman who answers the call. That's a clear cry for respect. Rayne wants it both ways—she wants to cheat and rely on outside interference, but she also wants to be recognized as TNA's top Knockout. She's playing a dangerous game by facing unknown opponents and not adequately preparing. Rayne is a credible champion and valuable part of the Knockouts roster, but a few losses can quickly take her from the top of the division to the basement. She needs to realize that before it is too late.

GRADE: B-

Photo by George Tahinos

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

HOMICIDE



GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Inasmuch as Homicide's primary goal toward the end of his TNA stint was to get his release, he was successful. But, undoubtedly, the Brooklyn native cannot be satisfied with how the past 12 months of his career have gone. He was barely featured in TNA in 2010 before being sidelined with an injury in July. In December, he returned to ROH, where he once wore the heavyweight title, and was immediately treated as a headline act. But he was unable to defeat Roderick Strong at ROH's Ninth Anniversary Show in Chicago in February to recapture the title.

GRADE: C

MARKETABILITY: Some ROH diehards may love him, but the streetwise Homicide will always have a hard time being embraced by the masses. He's short, not in particularly good shape, and simply too controversial to ever make it in prime time. (He named his finisher Da Cop Killa.) Ironically, it's those same characteristics that have made him a virtual legend in the Northeast independent scene, where urban crowds can truly relate to the Puerto Rican scrapper. Unfortunately, that appeal doesn't easily translate to mainstream America.

GRADE: B-

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

REPERTOIRE: When he was first cutting his teeth in the independent scene, Homicide's arsenal of suplexes, complex submission holds, and cruiserweight-style offense was as cutting edge as it came. But it's been 18 years since Homicide competed in his first match, and he's done little in recent years to expand his move set. Ironically, part of the reason Homicide's wrestling style seems somewhat familiar is the fact that he's had a hand in training so many wrestlers in the New York area. But the best teachers never stop learning.

GRADE: B

CAREER GROWTH: On February 23, 2002, Homicide competed in the very first Ring of Honor event. He went on to travel the world, win several titles, and spend five years in TNA. And nine years later, almost to the day, there was Homicide—challenging for the ROH championship in front of 1,500 people in Chicago. In his mid-30s and with nearly two decades' experience, Homicide may have hoped to have achieved more by now. But given the limitations of his size, style, and gimmick, it's a credit to him that he's gone as far as he has.

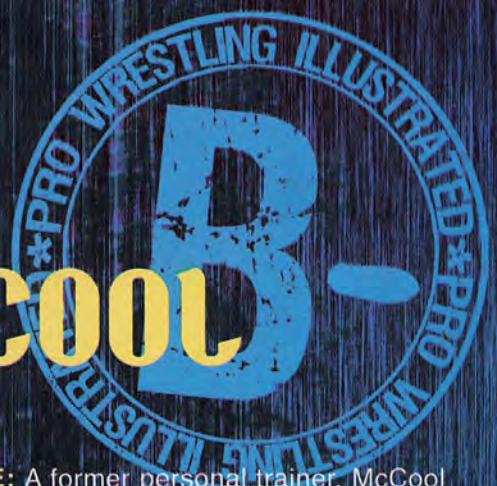
GRADE: B-

OVERALL VALUE: As a former heavyweight champion with a big following in the important New York market, and years of experience on national television with TNA, Homicide is unquestionably an asset to the ROH lockerroom. But he has too many miles on him to be seriously considered as a long-term headliner. Despite all that, he's far better off working in ROH and the independent scene, where his gifts are appreciated, than he was being lost in the shuffle in TNA.

GRADE: B-

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

MICHELLE McCOOL



GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: If her association with Layla El has proven anything, it's that staying at or near the top of the Divas pecking order is more important to McCool than owning the spotlight. To that end, Lay-Cool has been a success. While some would rather see McCool sink or swim on her own, she's been able to forge a long run on television while wreaking havoc with her partner in crime. Even when possessing "one-half" of the WWE Women's title with Layla, McCool seemed more than satisfied. She was at her best, however, upon defeating Melina at Night of Champions to unify the two WWE women's titles.

GRADE: A-

MARKETABILITY: Regardless of what she accomplishes in the ring, some fans criticize her for being bland. She is attractive, but not overwhelmingly so. Her promo skills are average at best. Hiding behind Layla causes resentment among fans, and being married to The Undertaker has drawn fire from haters who feel she has risen on his black leather coattails.

GRADE: B-

REPERTOIRE: A former personal trainer, McCool may be the most well-conditioned and athletically gifted of all the current Divas. A product of the Ohio Valley Wrestling developmental system, she is not particularly flashy in the ring, but is fundamentally smooth and sound. McCool's outstanding leg strength is the basis for her most effective moves, be it the straightforward McKick (big boot), roundhouse kick, baseball slide, or the Faith Breaker (belly-to-back inverted slam). However, her move set is limited and she sometimes becomes predictable when failing to put opponents away early.

GRADE: C+

CAREER GROWTH: Very quietly, McCool has already established herself as one of the best female competitors of her generation. She has enjoyed long reigns with both the WWE Women's and Divas championships. Looking at her body of work, it's difficult to argue against the notion that she's moved up on the list of all-time great female wrestlers, even if it has not been a particularly stellar era. Her partnership with Layla has helped her achieve.

GRADE: B+

Photo by George Napolitano

OVERALL VALUE: McCool may not be mentioned among the talk of WWE's most essential assets, but she is unquestionably one of the pillars of the Divas division. Take her and/or Lay-Cool out of the equation and the popular Divas would have very few credible heels to match up against, especially considering the inactivity of Maryse and the limitations of the Bella Twins. It may sound like an overstatement at first, but for what it's worth, McCool may be the ongoing MVP of the Divas circuit.

GRADE: B-

©2011 World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc. All Rights Reserved

REY MYSTERIO JR.

PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED ★ PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED

B-

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Defeating Jack Swagger to win the World heavyweight title for a second time was about a lot more than adding to Mysterio's overcrowded trophy case. For the veteran high-flyer, it was a matter of vindication; something he had been seeking for the better part of the past five years. Right or wrong, Mysterio's initial run with the title in 2006 has been viewed by many critics and contemporaries as a fluke. Those claims have now been put to rest, despite the fact that Mysterio's second reign lasted only 28 days (thanks to Kane cashing in his Money in the Bank title shot and preying on an already weakened champion). Perhaps most importantly, Mysterio had a relatively healthy year, a rarity for him at this stage of his career.

GRADE: B

MARKETABILITY: Mysterio remains one of the most popular and idolized wrestlers in the world. He is second only to John Cena in WWE merchandise sales and media requests. As colorful as they come, Mysterio's wide array of masks and ring gear styles keeps his look fresh with a (especially his comic book-inspired WrestleMania costumes, which annually inspire much anticipation among his fans). His popularity has yet to show signs of waning, though it will be interesting to see what impact the WWE arrival of Sin Cara (the former Mistico) may have.

GRADE: A

Photo by George Napolitano

REPERTOIRE: Age and injury have taken their tolls on Mysterio, and forced him to modify his style. Experience, however, has helped make him a smarter and more complete performer. He can still fly with the best of them, but he takes far fewer unnecessary chances nowadays. Despite standing on knees that have both been surgically repaired multiple times, he remains lightning quick, and can strike from any angle before his opponents know what hit them. Mysterio has long been proficient at using his size "disadvantage" to his advantage. One issue is that Mysterio seems to be slowly running out of innovations: his 6-1-9, for instance, has been countered more lately than ever before. A new wrinkle or two might help prolong his career even further.

GRADE: B-

CAREER GROWTH: Is Mysterio one of the all-time greats? Certainly, he is the most successful WWE wrestler to come out of the lucha ranks in Mexico. Winning a second World title added more luster to his already-glimmering resume. However, failure to hold on to the belt for even a month (regardless of the circumstances under which he lost it) will not dispel questions about his ability to stay at the top for a prolonged period. Losing to former luchadore Alberto Del Rio in his WWE TV debut also seemed to knock Mysterio down a peg. He's shown the ability to recover before, so it's hard to doubt that he will do so again.

GRADE: B-

OVERALL VALUE: Mysterio is simply one of the best assets WWE has. He is perhaps undervalued, if anything, though most critics seem to agree that he is on the downside of his career. Though he has remained relatively healthy of late, rumors about another extended absence continue to dog him. With Del Rio rocketing up the rankings and Sin Cara set to debut, more Latino stars are being thrust into high-profile roles. Could Mysterio's time as an elite WWE performer be reaching its end?

GRADE: B-

Photo by George Napolitano

AJ STYLES

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: AJ Styles is finally putting his money where his mouth is. For years, Styles has bragged about being a TNA original. He has called himself TNA's franchise player, and we're inclined to agree with him. However, for a "franchise player," Styles has allowed himself to become a flunky too many times. He has been Kurt Angle's court jester, Ric Flair's "Mini-Me," and a stooge for Immortal. Styles has finally made a stand, breaking Fortune away from Immortal and Flair and for the good of TNA. It's about time. Now he needs to prove that he can succeed as a leader and not a follower.

GRADE: B

MARKETABILITY: Styles is a veritable human highlight reel, and he is one of the most respected and admired wrestlers on the TNA roster. He is TNA's biggest homegrown star and deserves to be the face of the company. He's not a great speaker, but his actions in the ring speak for him. Styles sells plenty of t-shirts and DVDs, and now that he has broken away from Immortal, his stock is bound to rise.

GRADE: A

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

REPERTOIRE: Styles is one of wrestling's premier high-flyers. Any questions about his submission and grappling game were answered during his feud with Kurt Angle in 2009-10, when Styles went hold-for-hold with the Olympic champion. Styles is a wrestler's wrestler. He learned a lot from studying under Flair and Angle, and has learned to expertly pace himself in a match and save his flashy, high-risk moves for moments of maximum impact. His only weakness is his smallish size, but Styles has been overcoming that "handicap" for 13 years now.

GRADE: A

CAREER GROWTH: Over the past few years, Styles' name had become synonymous with the TNA World title, as he was either wearing the title belt or contending for it. But in 2010, Styles was as far from the championship as he ever was, appearing on *Impact* as just a face in the crowd of some factions, and dropping house show matches to men he was capable of defeating. It is commendable that Styles is assuming a leadership position of sorts in TNA, but this development occurred very late in our evaluation period, and unfortunately, we can only grade AJ for what he actually did in 2010, not what he might do in 2011.

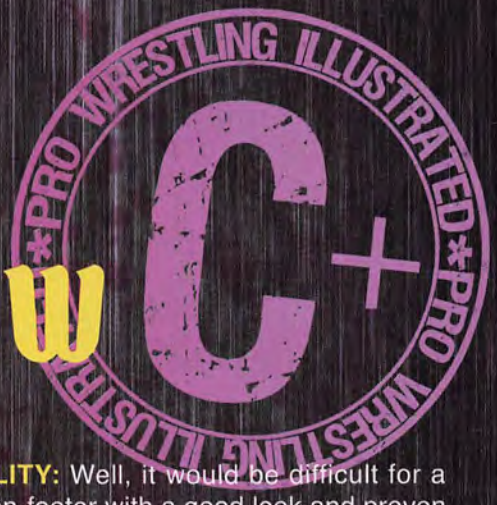
GRADE: D

OVERALL VALUE: Styles is an invaluable asset for TNA. Unfortunately, both he and TNA seem to continuously forget that fact. Styles allows himself to get pigeonholed in supporting roles. He needs to assert himself, for his own good and for the good of TNA itself. Styles is a loyal soldier who has the talent to take TNA to a new level. Properly utilized, he is the most valuable wrestler on the TNA roster. The key is that Styles has to stand up and make sure he is in a leadership role, and he is doing that now.

GRADE: B-

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

THE BIG SHOW



GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Show has now logged a dozen years in WWE (counting one extended hiatus). He has pretty much accomplished it all, experiencing the highs of winning world championships and headlining WrestleMania to the low of being sent back to Ohio Valley Wrestling to work on his conditioning. At this stage of his career, each year seems to follow a certain template: a little time lower on the card, a hot feud or two, and a run (usually unsuccessful) at the World or WWE title. This past year, he had a solid (and often funny) run as a WWE tag team champion with The Miz, challenged Jack Swagger for the World title, and then dominated CM Punk and The Straight Edge Society in a heated feud. We'll call it a quietly solid, productive year.

GRADE: B

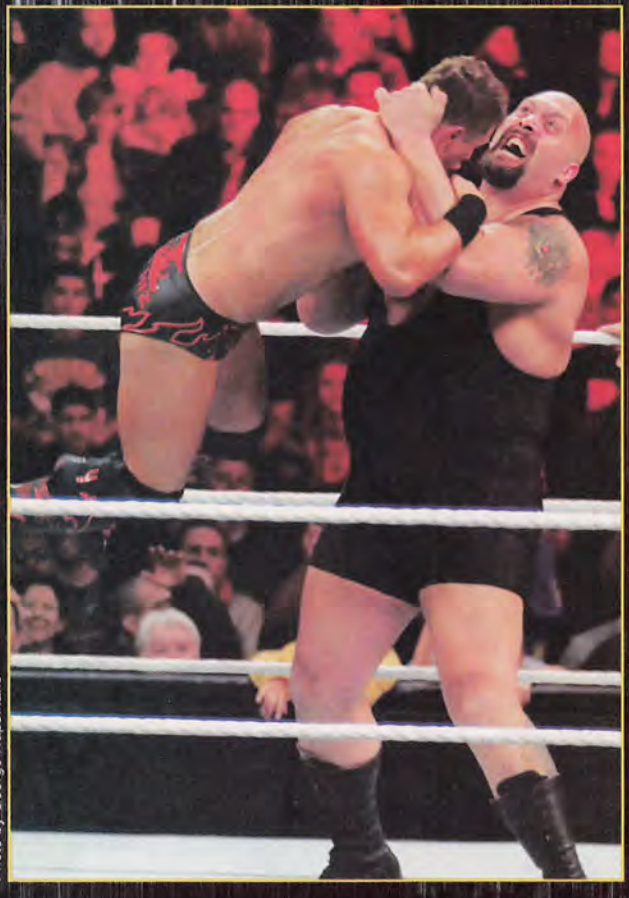


Photo by George Napolitano

MARKETABILITY: Well, it would be difficult for a ferocious seven-footer with a good look and proven comedic skills not to be at least a little marketable. Show was, is, and will continue to be more than a little marketable. In fact, he took a hiatus from wrestling a few years ago in part to try to delve deeper into acting. He did well this past year with his role in the WWE Films release *Knucklehead*. He also does the occasional guest spot on TV shows and drops by talk shows on occasion.

GRADE: B+

REPERTOIRE: In a perfect world, Big Show would be studying tapes of The Undertaker, who has upgraded his repertoire significantly late in his career, studying footage of future foes, taking copious notes, and figuring out the weaknesses and holes in his own attack while putting in gym time at least five days per week. In the real world, Show isn't known for his tireless work ethic. That knockout punch of his sure is potent, isn't it? Same for his chops, clotheslines, and choke-slams. They helped him dominate CM Punk and annihilate his Straight Edge Society, so we can't criticize too harshly.

GRADE: C+

CAREER GROWTH: As noted above, he was in essentially the same spot at the outset of 2011 as he was at the outset of 2010 (and 2009). It's a bit of a shame he couldn't parlay his dominance against Punk, who was one of WWE's hottest stars when their feud began and remained hot after it was over, into something special (he last held a world title in 2002).

GRADE: D

OVERALL VALUE: WWE probably has no desire to wish Show well in his future endeavors, but, well, would his departure sting that badly? Even though this past year was a pretty good year, he didn't stand out all that much. He's valuable in that, as usual, he filled a lot of roles up or down the card, but his presence was less than essential.

GRADE: C+

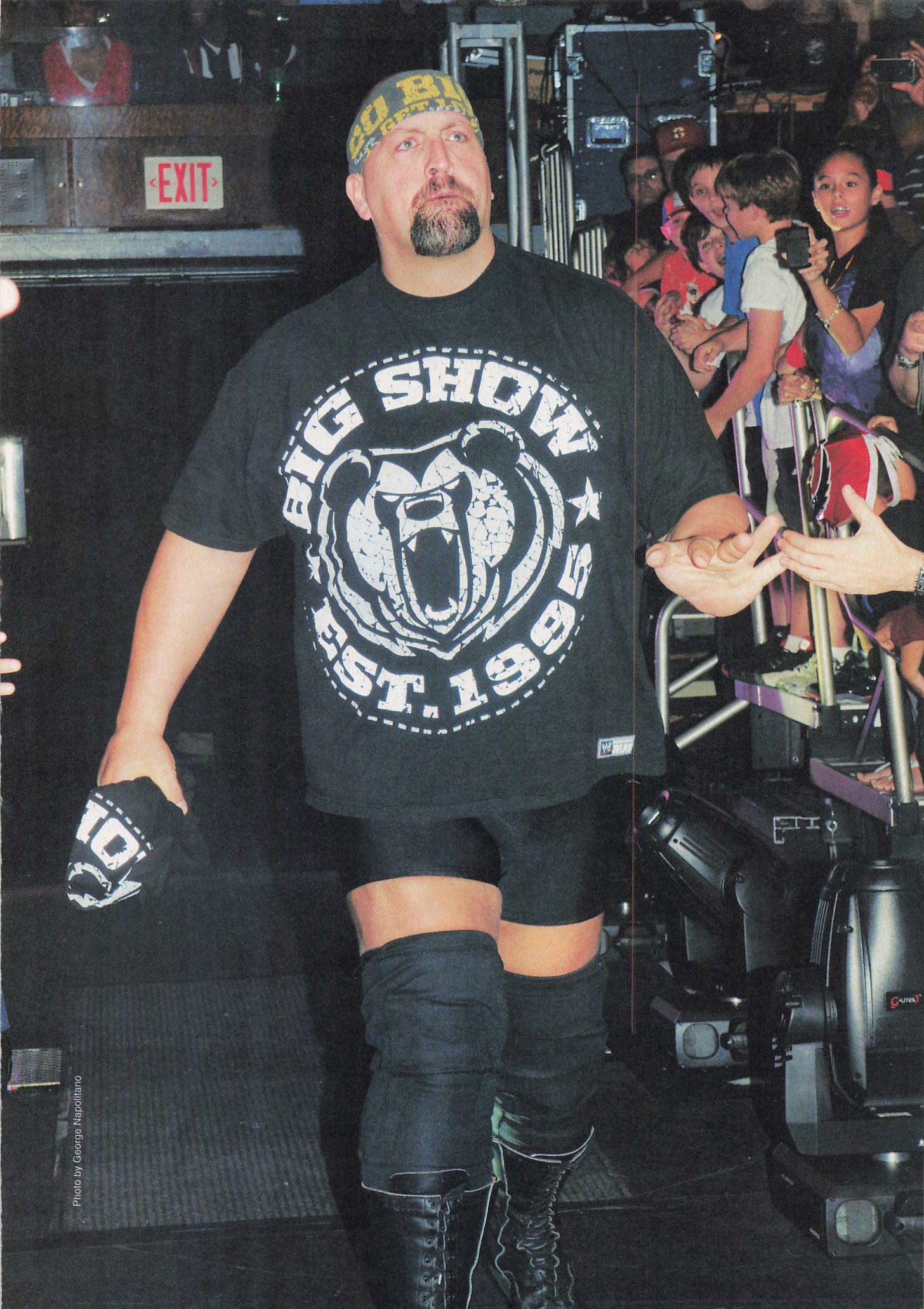


Photo by George Napolitano

ANGELINA LOVE

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Aside from a few brief periods of inactivity, Love has been a fixture in TNA since the Knockout division was established nearly four years ago. Along with her Beautiful People counterpart Velvet Sky, the veteran Toronto native seems to have gotten over her obsession with humiliating her rivals and is now more fixated on winning championships. Over the past year, Love won her third, fourth, and fifth Knockouts titles. However, these reigns totaled a mere 77 days. In December, Love captured her first Knockouts tag team title with new partner Winter. While this partnership has been uneasy at times, it has proven to be an in-ring success story.

GRADE: B

MARKETABILITY: Love's track record speaks for itself, and for that reason she may be the most respected member of the Knockouts roster. Still, while once she was considered one of the faces of the division, that is not so much the case today. Former WWE Women's champ Mickie James is now the top female star in TNA, while ex-Beautiful People understudy Madison Rayne, Tara, and Sarita have taken over as the resident villains. Love, Velvet Sky, and now Winter all have roles to play, but this "popular" version of The Beautiful People is nowhere nearly as essential as the antagonistic version that carried the Knockouts division at times.

GRADE: C+

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

REPORTOIRE: A crafty vet, Love knows every trick in the book and a few that didn't make the final edit. Despite her popularity with the TNA faithful, she will bend and break the rules to get the job done; and rarely does she get caught. Love exhibits a diverse move set, and while she does not excel in any particular style, she can hang with the technicians, brawlers, and high-flyers alike. She tends to favor a high-impact offense that relies heavily on hard kicks and also uses innovative versions of several standard holds.

GRADE: B-

CAREER GROWTH: At this stage of her career, Love has amassed a record five Knockouts title reigns. But that one dominant, extended title reign—ala Awesome Kong—has eluded her. Her tag team championship with Winter, which ended in early March, certainly adds to Love's legacy, but that title gets very little respect. Factor in the emergence of James, Sarita, and Rayne, and it becomes difficult to see where Love's career grew in the past year.

GRADE: C

OVERALL VALUE: Not too long ago, The Beautiful People was one of the hottest heel acts in wrestling. But times have changed, and Love's value to TNA and, specifically, the Knockouts division now lies more in her capabilities as a solid veteran presence. This isn't to say that she's not an important member of the roster, nor is it meant to downgrade her status as a former Knockouts tag team champion. It is, however, quite clear that she has taken a fairly substantial tumble in the division's pecking order.

GRADE: C+

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

DAVID OTUNGA

PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED C+

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: For such an ambitious and, by his own admission, ego-driven wrestler, Otunga has spent the majority of his early career taking orders from others. Even when Otunga finally led the rebellion against Wade Barrett's tyrannical control of The Nexus and Barrett was driven out of the faction, he quickly acquiesced to CM Punk's takeover. Otunga did win the WWE tag team championship with a reluctant John Cena as his partner, but he was the lesser member of the team. Although he has less than two years of ring experience, Otunga is already 31 years old. If he's to have a significant solo wrestling career, he needs to branch out on his own in the near future.

GRADE: C+

MARKETABILITY: Otunga's very presence in WWE is all about his marketability. The Harvard Law School graduate has the brains as well as the physical charisma to stand out from the rest of the pack. Of course, being engaged to Jennifer Hudson adds to the mainstream attention he brings to himself and his employer. The former reality TV star loves the camera and is a natural smooth talker, although he has yet to deliver a truly memorable promo. For the most part, he has done a lot of standing in the background with his other allies as Barrett—and now microphone master Punk—do the talking.

GRADE: B

REPERTOIRE: To put it kindly, Otunga's ring skills are still a work in progress. His lack of experience is sometimes painfully evident and he can be sloppy in his execution of even the most basic moves. He's improved somewhat since his time on *NXT*, but it's unlikely he'll ever develop into a technical marvel. He makes use of a side suplex and powerslams, as well as kicks and punches in most of his matches, but lacks anything resembling a true signature move. However, Otunga is powerfully built and has always had the peace of mind of knowing that others have his back if he gets in trouble in a match.

GRADE: D

CAREER GROWTH: For understandable marketing reasons, WWE clearly wants Otunga to be a success. He has demonstrated a good work ethic and seems determined to improve in the ring. Taking a supporting role in Nexus to Barrett was understandable in the early going, but when the opportunity finally came to spread his wings, he opted to take a backseat to Punk. Perhaps Otunga has a master plan the rest of the wrestling world isn't privy to, but it doesn't seem like it so far. Having gotten such a late start in the wrestling business, time is not on his side to the same degree as most of his current and former Nexus comrades. And it could be argued that Otunga created more of a stir on *NXT* than he has on *Raw*.

GRADE: B-

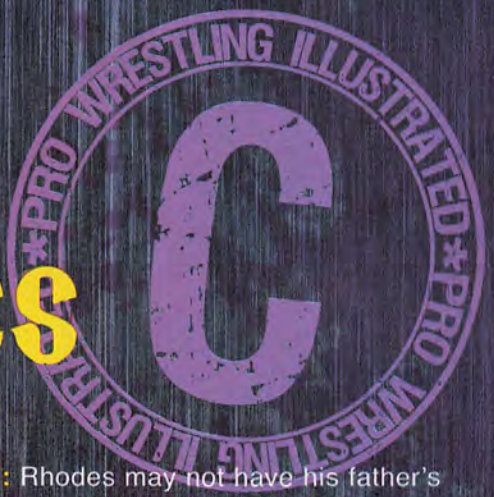
OVERALL VALUE: WWE could live just fine without David Otunga, and Otunga doesn't need wrestling to make money and enjoy a certain degree of fame. Nevertheless, each is useful to the other and both appear committed to making it work. Because WWE seems in no hurry to curtail the Nexus storyline, expect to see Otunga participate in plenty of prominent programs. But what role he plays and what he does with the opportunities remains to be seen.

GRADE: C+

©2011 World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc. All Rights Reserved

Photo by Wayne McCarty

CODY RHODES



GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: In the waning days of Legacy, Rhodes and Ted DiBiase Jr. spent more time blaming group leader Randy Orton and each other for their respective inability to advance their solo careers. After the faction dissolved, Orton became a fan favorite and remained a key figure in the world title picture. His two former comrades have continued to spin their wheels. After moving to Smackdown, Rhodes collected another tag team belt (this time, with Drew McIntyre as his partner) but once again watched his team fall apart due to the massive egos of the participants. End result: "Dashing" Cody Rhodes may have picked up a self-appointed nickname since last year, but little has changed for him otherwise.

GRADE: C

MARKETABILITY: Rhodes has always wanted to be known as more than just the son of the legendary Dusty Rhodes, but his attempts to carve a unique identity have thus far met with middling success. More recently, Cody surreptitiously enlisted his father's help in a feud the younger Rhodes provoked with fan favorite Rey Mysterio Jr. Whether Rhodes' current campaign will lead to the break he needs to become a bankable commodity in WWE remains to be seen.

GRADE: C

Photo by George Napolitano

REPERTOIRE: Rhodes may not have his father's charisma, but he is a better natural athlete in far better physical condition than Dusty was, even in his prime. The elder Rhodes relied on brawling and razzle dazzle (it's hard to imagine Cody pulling off the fist-roll elbowsmash combination with the same panache), while Cody is a better natural technician. Cody has sufficient skill and diversity to his repertoire to effectively set up his Cross-Rhodes facebuster finishing move. The bigger problem has been his own cockiness costing him matches.

GRADE: B

CAREER GROWTH: Rhodes' participation in Legacy and tag team success with DiBiase was supposed to be the springboard to bigger and better things. Thus far, however, the early days of the faction represent his strongest accomplishments to date. At 25, Rhodes still has not reached his prime, so there's plenty of time to start living up to his potential. However, if he continues down the same path, he's going to remain in the middle of the WWE pack for the foreseeable future.

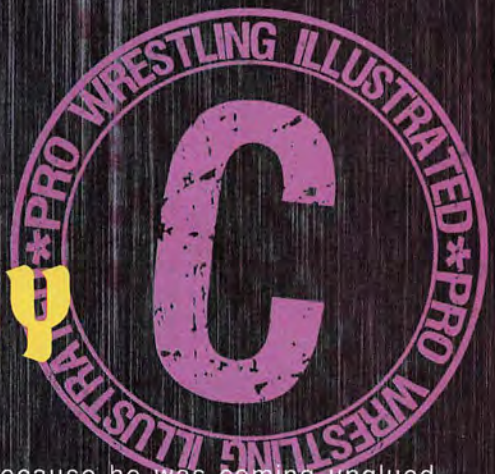
GRADE: C

OVERALL VALUE: Legacy started out with a bang and, even after their momentum slowed down and the faction broke up, there was hope that Rhodes could make a successful fresh start on Smackdown. Since that time, he has repeatedly taken one step forward followed by one step back. In the hyper-competitive WWE roster, a wrestler's long-term stagnation in the mid-card is, in reality, the same thing as regression. Rhodes has yet to capture one of the WWE's secondary singles titles—a rite of passage that he will have to experience before he can realistically hope to work his way into serious contention for one of the two big belts. The next 12 months will be crucial in determining whether Rhodes will start to become the breakout star he envisions himself to be, or just another generic "superstar."

GRADE: C

Photo by George Napolitano

MATT HARDY



GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Matt Hardy got what he wanted—a release from WWE and the opportunity to compete alongside his brother in TNA. The methods Hardy used to gain his release, however, left much to be desired. Hardy showed zero professionalism and some very poor decision-making by posting a series of bizarre rants online and forcing WWE's hand. It would be one thing if Hardy walked out of WWE and became an immediate TNA World title contender, but instead, he came into TNA as a glorified stooge in Immortal.

GRADE: B-

MARKETABILITY: Matt has never been able to match his little brother in terms of popularity, but he still has some Mattitude followers in his corner. His unorthodox behavior and decision to join Immortal has cost him some of his most diehard fans. There is a perception that Hardy was fired from WWE because he was coming unglued. That's not exactly a PR coup for TNA.

GRADE: C+

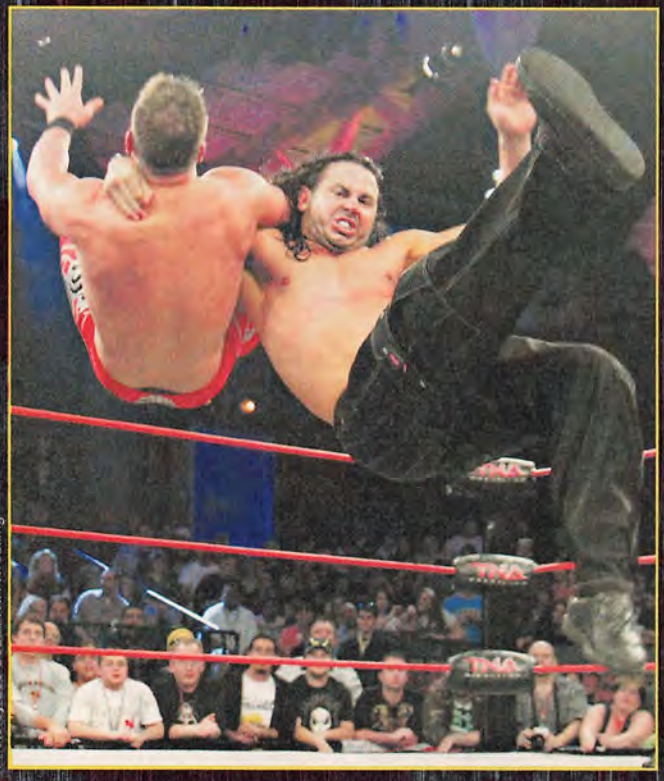


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

REPERTOIRE: Matt is a better all-around wrestler than his brother, Jeff, and he is a better ring general. He sticks with basic moves that are difficult to counter, as opposed to Jeff's addiction to high-risk dives. That being said, Matt hasn't added a new move to his repertoire in years. His Twist of Hate rarely has knockout power. His brawling is poor, as he throws big, looping hooks that are easily blocked and have little power behind them. His ground game is limited and his conditioning is questionable. Hardy's quickness and passion have helped him overcome his limitations, but he needs to add more to his game if he really wants to make a splash in TNA.

GRADE: C+

CAREER GROWTH: There are two ways of looking at Hardy's decision to jump to TNA. An optimist would say Hardy is getting a fresh start in a new environment after growing stagnant after more than a decade in WWE. A pessimist might say that Hardy underachieved for the past several years in WWE and that joining TNA was a sign that he couldn't cut it there. We're willing to give Hardy the benefit of the doubt, but he's going to have to prove himself.

GRADE: C+

OVERALL VALUE: Hardy has name value. If positioned the right way, he can be a marketable attraction. Like Charlie Sheen, he has been able to keep the Internet community captivated with his strange behavior. Right now, Matt might be most valuable to TNA as the full-time tag team partner of Jeff. A Hardy Boyz reunion and subsequent matches against Beer Money and The Motor City Machine Guns could be PPV main events. The potential is there. If Hardy instead opts to work as a thug who merely does Eric Bischoff's bidding, though, he's no more valuable than Gunner and Murphy.

GRADE: C

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

DREW McINTYRE

PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED * PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED *

C

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: When Vince McMahon himself publicly hails you as future world championship material, it is easy to get a swelled head. When you were already driven by impatience and a huge ego in the first place like "The Sinister Scotsman," and you don't go straight to the top, it's easy to give in to frustration. McIntyre's Intercontinental championship and Unified tag team championship with Cody Rhodes is not good enough for the ambitious McIntyre. He hates waiting in line, but the wait for main-event status will be longer until he channels his aggressiveness into fewer DQ losses and ultimately meaningless feuds.

GRADE: C

MARKETABILITY: McIntyre has an array of positives working for him—talent, physique, killer instinct, and size. But even for a heel, he may actually be a little too intense, and could stand to tone down his harshness. When he has wrestled in the U.K., he has sometimes allowed his charisma to come out. Fans and opponents on this side of the Atlantic might respect him more if he showed a little more respect in return.

GRADE: C

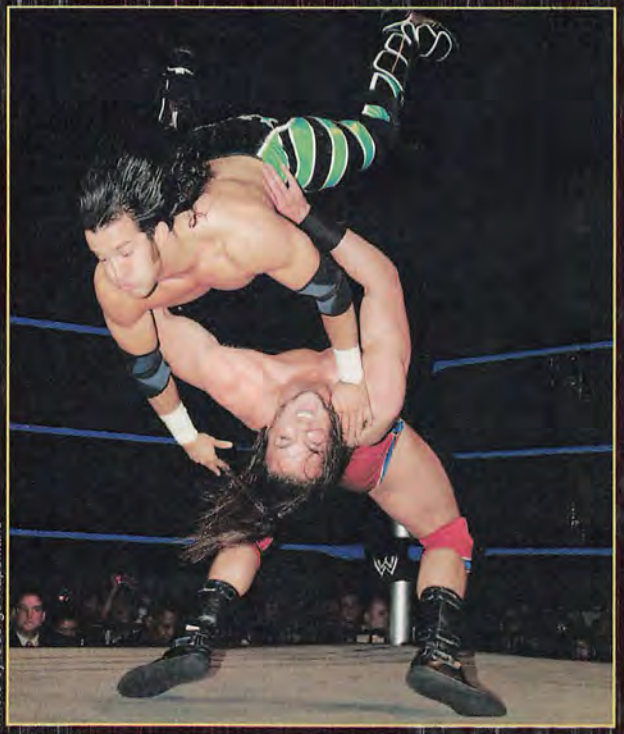


Photo by George Napolitano

REPERTOIRE: There is nothing groundbreaking about the Scotsman's catalog of moves, but he usually executes them well. His "Future Shock" version of the DDT is delivered with heavy impact and more often than not spells the end of a match. At 6'5" he has leverage over many of his opponents and, at a well-knit 256 pounds, is also big enough to hold his own physically against some of the super heavyweights. McIntyre can't be pigeonholed as a brawler or technical wrestler. His style is a hybrid.

GRADE: B

CAREER GROWTH: McIntyre wasted little time winning his first Intercontinental championship in WWE, but singles titles have not been forthcoming since then. His decision to form a tag team with Cody Rhodes was at best a lateral move, even though the duo captured the title before the inevitable friction between the two egomaniacs tore them apart. Since then, he has seemed uncertain of whether to target one of the champions or go after Rhodes and other enemies. It is hard to say that McIntyre's career is further along right now than it was a year ago, and that has to be considered a disappointment considering all the hype he's received.

GRADE: C

OVERALL VALUE: The Undertaker and Triple-H are aging and breaking down physically. Chris Jericho is on hiatus for however long he chooses. Edge is pondering life outside wrestling in the next few years. John Cena can't go on forever. In other words, WWE is on the brink of a power vacuum, in which McIntyre is considered one of the prime candidates to the fill the impending void. He's still more about potential than actual accomplishments at this point, but he remains very much in the mix to become a breakout star.

GRADE: C

Photo by George Napolitano

JOHN MORRISON

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: "The Shaman Of Sexy" has used his parkour talents to become the resident spider monkey of WWE. Morrison flips, he dives, and he jumps, but all of his acrobatics are doing nothing to move him closer to the WWE championship. Like Kofi Kingston before him, Morrison is turning into a novelty act—an athletically gifted wrestler who can be counted upon to deliver some memorable moves in big matches, but fails to get the job done in the end. Big losses to Sheamus and Miz have reinforced his position as a mid-card attraction, not a title contender.

GRADE: C+

MARKETABILITY: Morrison may have model good looks, but he still comes across as rather bland and superficial. He was John Hennigan, then he was Johnny Nitro, and then he was John Morrison. He has changed his name, but we still don't know much about the man himself. He has a showy entrance, a good look, and some hot moves, but his real personality hasn't come through yet. Until that happens, his marketability is limited.

GRADE: B-

Photo by George Napolitano

REPERTOIRE: Morrison's "Starship Pain" is impressive in its grace and fluidity, but it is not a particularly damaging move. Morrison often lands with his weight low on his hips, meaning he absorbs just as much of the force of impact as his opponent. An rarely achieves the desired impact, and an opponent who has adequately scouted the move can avoid it or counter with a simple kneelift. Most of Morrison's signature moves involve him using his own body as a weapon. That reckless style can cause injuries and unnecessary risks. Fortunately, he is a terrific physical specimen, which has allowed him to avoid serious injury, but his style is more flash than substance. His ground game is sadly lacking and he lacks pacing and effective wear-down holds. It takes more than an ability to jump and somersault to be a great wrestler.

GRADE: C

CAREER GROWTH: When Morrison won the ECW championship, many observers thought he had the potential to become a future world champion. That was nearly four years ago. Arguably, he was closer to a world championship then than he is today. Who could have predicted that his former tag team partner, The Miz, would beat him to the WWE title? Morrison is still a featured star on Raw, and the door hasn't closed on his world title aspirations, but his momentum has certainly stalled. His parkour tricks are entertaining, but some big wins over CM Punk, Randy Orton, or John Cena would be much more impressive.

GRADE: C

OVERALL VALUE: WWE has a lot of faith in Morrison. He's the only former *Tough Enough* competitor still under a WWE contract. WWE would like nothing more than to see Morrison develop into the next Shawn Michaels. He is nowhere near that level, and likely won't be. But he can still improve beyond where he is today. Morrison should be a PPV main-eventer, not a stunt man. A couple of memorable leaps a year isn't good enough.

GRADE: C

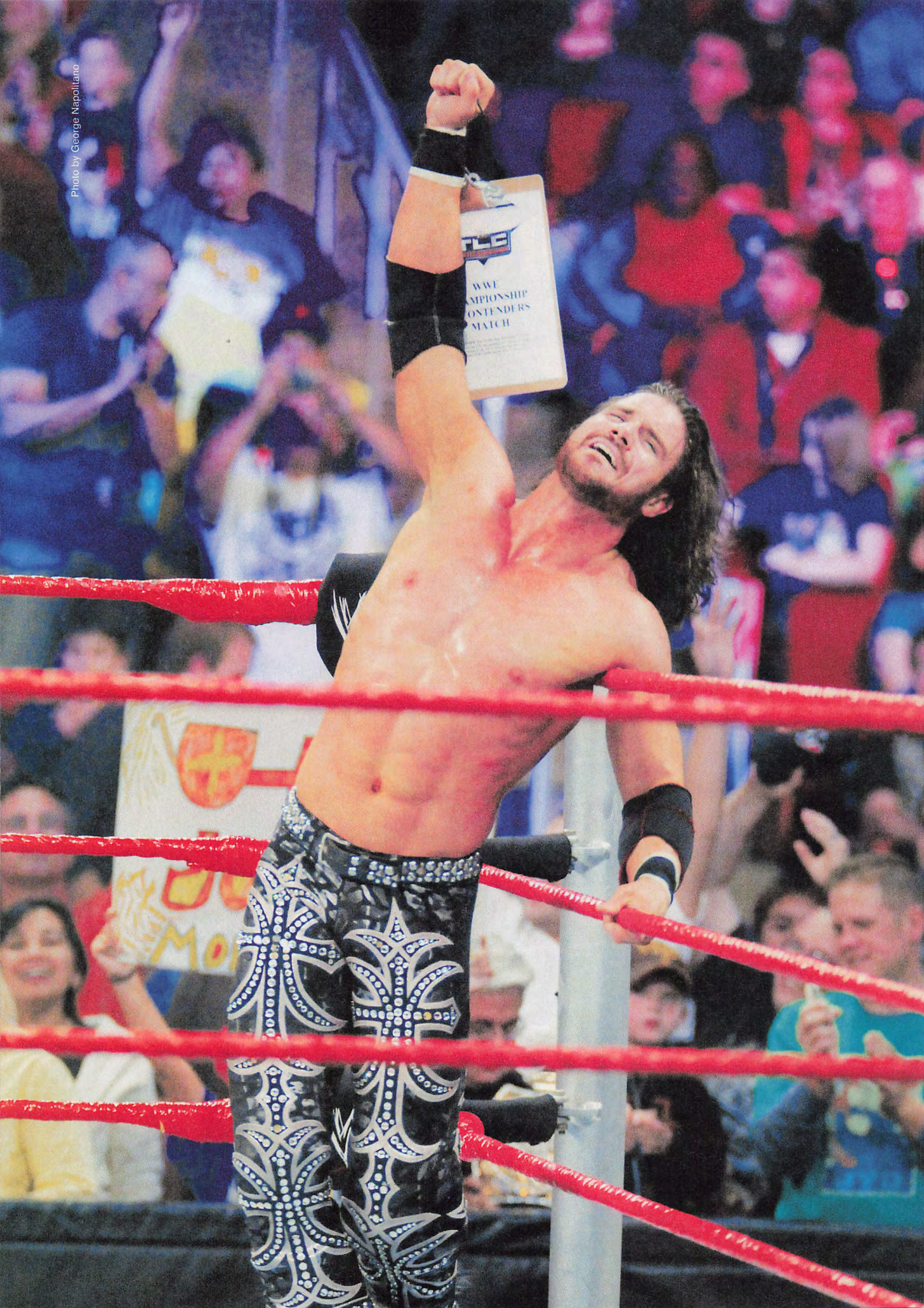


Photo by George Napolitano

R-TRUTH

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Steady progress had to have been R-Truth's objective for the grading period, as he had not made much headway since returning to WWE in the summer of 2008. His year didn't exactly stand out, but included in it were feuds with Ted DiBiase Jr. and The Miz, a spot in the Smackdown World title match inside that ghastly cage at the Elimination Chamber pay-per-view, a shot at the tag title with John Morrison at WrestleMania 26, and a move to Raw.

GRADE: B-

MARKETABILITY: We wonder if anyone in WWE has ever thought of doing something with the man's rapping skills. Just kidding. Of course someone has considered it. Although he turns on the crowds with his "What's Up?" rap during his ring entrance, WWE hasn't done much to capitalize on this talent, so forgive us if we aren't optimistic about the potential.

GRADE: C-

REPERTOIRE: Intensity and energy are two words that come to mind when we think about R-Truth's arsenal. He never seems to lack either, and yet, somehow, the whole package is far from scintillating. He'll give you some nice suplex and legdrop variations, but something is missing. Maybe more than one thing. His Lie Detector finisher worked nicely for him at times during the past year, though it is difficult to dissect and describe the move other than to perhaps call it a corkscrew shoulderblock.

GRADE: C

CAREER GROWTH: This is a complicated category for R-Truth. We have graded him fairly high here because he did become a more prominent player for Smackdown and later Raw. But was it just a case of WWE giving him something to do and using him to fill out cards, or was it (we hope) just the first of many steps forward? He actually beat The Miz for the vacant U.S. title in May, and look at where Miz went from there. Yet Truth's reign lasted but three weeks, making it eminently forgettable. His career grew, but did anyone notice? This will be a telling year for him. If he remains stagnant, his WWE future will be looking tenuous.

GRADE: B-

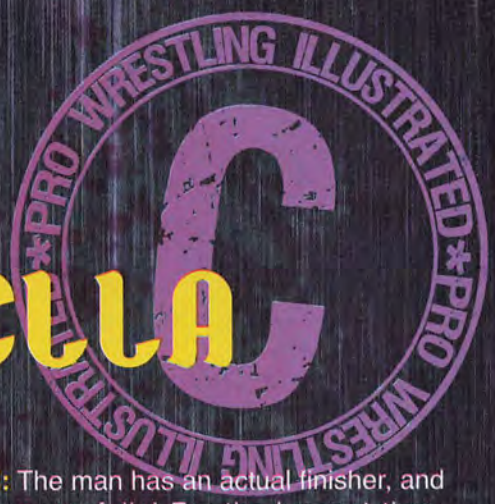
OVERALL VALUE: Less than a decade ago, Truth (using his given name, Ron Killings) looked like a huge part of TNA's future. These days, he merely adds depth to the Raw roster (and previously to the Smackdown roster). Need proof? Consider this: He participated in the Smackdown Elimination Chamber match at the PPV of the same name. He joined Team Raw in their epic battle against Nexus at SummerSlam. And he was part of Team Raw as it took on Team Smackdown at Bragging Rights. Now ask yourself this: Was he an integral part of any of those bouts?

GRADE: C

©2011 World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc. All Rights Reserved

©2011 World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc. All Rights Reserved

SANTINO MARELLA



GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Your guess is as good as ours as to what Santino's goals are on any given day. They might range from having fun every time he goes out to the ring to holding all the titles in WWE at the same time (come on, couldn't you envision him saying that?). Maybe we should consider our main goal for him as becoming a more credible wrestler. A pretty modest goal, but he did well in that respect without compromising his comedic skills.

GRADE: B-

MARKETABILITY: In January of last year, WWE announced plans to develop a sitcom around Santino, Vladimir Kozlov, and Beth Phoenix. Sounds like it would have potential if it ever got off the ground. Marella has some popular T-shirts available through WWE, and his skills are vast, so marketing possibilities are there. Heck, he might even have greater potential outside WWE.

GRADE: B

Photo by Wayne McCarty

REPERTOIRE: The man has an actual finisher, and he's used it successfully! For the longest time, Marella was nothing but a court jester in the ring, a man who seemed more at home competing with the Divas, and we didn't really know what his finisher was. The Cobra is probably just half a notch above the People's Elbow and Scotty 2 Hotty's Worm on the devastation meter, but it's fun. Unfortunately, he doesn't have many formidable complementary moves. Would you believe OVW once billed him as a Russian shootfighter?

GRADE: C-

CAREER GROWTH: Aren't Santino and Kozlov glad that they crossed paths? First, they were odd rivals, now they're an odd team ... with WWE tag team gold on their resume. Santino wrestled on only four WWE pay-per-views in 2010 (not counting The Royal Rumble), all in tag team competition, but it is significant that those were the last four of the year. That's progress. He is no longer just comic relief. He's more like 80 percent comic relief.

GRADE: C

OVERALL VALUE: The Rock will be glad to know that Santino knows his damn role and that it is not to shut his damn mouth. How do we know when Santino is being funny? Easy—when his lips are moving. Marella has been in WWE long enough for us to conclude that he probably is what he is. We can hope for improvement in the ring from him, just not drastic improvement. He made us laugh more often than he didn't last year, and that's what he will mostly continue to do in the future. A tag team specialist in an era in which tag team wrestling is devalued in WWE is about where he belongs. For some up-and-comers, the sky is the limit. For Santino, it's more like the top of that dogwood tree in your yard.

GRADE: C

Photo by Wayne McCarty

SHEAMUS

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Considering how impressive Sheamus' first year in WWE was, it is only natural to expect him to have a big step backwards in his sophomore season. Sheamus won a pair of WWE championships and manhandled the likes of John Cena and Randy Orton, establishing himself as one of the most dominant heels WWE had seen in many years. But recent lopsided losses to John Morrison, Mark Henry, Evan Bourne, and even Santino Marella have eroded his aura of invincibility, and he did himself no favors by wearing that silly Celtic king robe. Though he was able to beat Daniel Bryan for the U.S. title in March, who could have predicted a year ago that that would be considered a major upset?

GRADE: C-

MARKETABILITY: If WWE ever holds an event at Dalymount Park in Dublin, Sheamus is sure to be the most popular man on the roster. Unfortunately for Sheamus, tours of Ireland are few and far between. Sheamus' only hope for marketability is if he scores a sun block endorsement. He is a favorite of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, we hear.

GRADE: D

Photo by George Napolitano

REPERTOIRE: Sheamus is one of the best old-fashioned, smash-mouth brawlers in wrestling. He is big, nasty, and ill-tempered, and he has the physical strength to pound any opponent into the canvas. While his striking game is excellent and his high-impact moves (such as his Celtic Cross and Brogue Kick) are devastating, he needs work with his wear-down game. Instead of working on a body part to weaken an opponent, or using his power to tire out an opponent, his ground game is designed simply to punish. He twists arms, wrenches necks, and squeezes ribs to the breaking point, but he does so without a game plan or strategy. He's simply a bully, and a smart wrestler will always find a way to defeat a bully.

GRADE: C+

CAREER GROWTH: Other than Sheamus, the only wrestler to win the King of the Ring tournament *after* holding a world title was Harley Race, and Race's KOTR victory came four years after his last world title reign ended and in a different promotion. While the KOTR has been known to launch wrestlers into superstardom, it had the opposite effect for Sheamus. Since winning the crown, Sheamus slipped out of world title contention and into a pronounced slump. Hopefully for him, wins over Daniel and Kofi Kingston are a sign of good things to come.

GRADE: C-

OVERALL VALUE: It might sound like we're being hard on the "Celtic Warrior," and maybe we are. The fact of the matter is that we like him. He's a throwback, a no-nonsense, power merchant. There is no denying, however, that Sheamus has dropped a few notches from the beginning of the grading period. To his credit, he seems to have weathered the storm well, and a couple of big wins may have done wonders for his confidence.

GRADE: C

Photo by Wayne McCarty

JACK SWAGGER

C

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Over the course of the past year, Swagger achieved two of the biggest milestones anyone in the WWE can attain. First, he passed a huge rite of passage by winning the Money in the Bank Ladder Match at WrestleMania 26. Shortly thereafter, he opportunistically cashed in his on-demand title match to capture his first WWE World championship. Unfortunately, he did not exactly cover himself in glory in either instance. Moreover, his 82-day title reign (which was marred by several non-title match losses before surrendering the belt to Rey Mysterio Jr. at Fatal 4-Way) was a major disappointment. Thereafter, he has toiled in the mid-card with inconsistent results.

GRADE: B

MARKETABILITY: There are still some within WWE who see Swagger as a talent who could become at minimum a poor man's Kurt Angle as he matures from an amateur wrestling star to a seasoned sports-entertainer. He clearly isn't there yet, and has limitations (such as his oft-mocked lisp) to overcome. He is not yet a versatile performer, and that's going to be crucial to his long-term marketability and staying power. But youth is still on his side, and he has slowly begun to display a little more charisma.

GRADE: B-

Photo by George Napolitano

REPERTOIRE: Swagger's anklelock does not yet measure up to Angle's version, but he is starting to put his own stamp on it. Likewise, his gut-wrench power bomb may not be the best in the sport quite yet, but it's generally effective. Swagger has learned that his natural athleticism (he was a two-sport athlete in college) is sometimes of greater use in WWE than his extensive amateur wrestling background, but he is still a force to be reckoned with when he gets his opponent down on the mat.

GRADE: A-

CAREER GROWTH: Expectations have always been high for Swagger ever since he was recruited into WWE by Jim Ross and quickly won the ECW title. Unfortunately, the high expectations have also brought intense scrutiny, and Swagger has had his share of in-ring missteps along the way. His first World championship reign may have happened a little sooner than he was ready for, especially since he endured losing streaks both before and after winning the MITB match and then the title. A second reign atop WWE does not seem imminent, but the long-term potential remains fairly strong.

GRADE: C

OVERALL VALUE: Along with the likes of Sheamus, Drew McIntyre, and Ted DiBiase Jr., Swagger is one of a handful of young talents vying to become a long-term main-eventer in WWE. He has had spotty success to date, but has rapidly gained the respect of his peers and has never given management reason for concern about his professionalism or reliability. Over time, he still has the potential to evolve into a top-tier star, but it has become evident that he has a long way to go before he achieves anything close to that status in the public eye.

GRADE: C

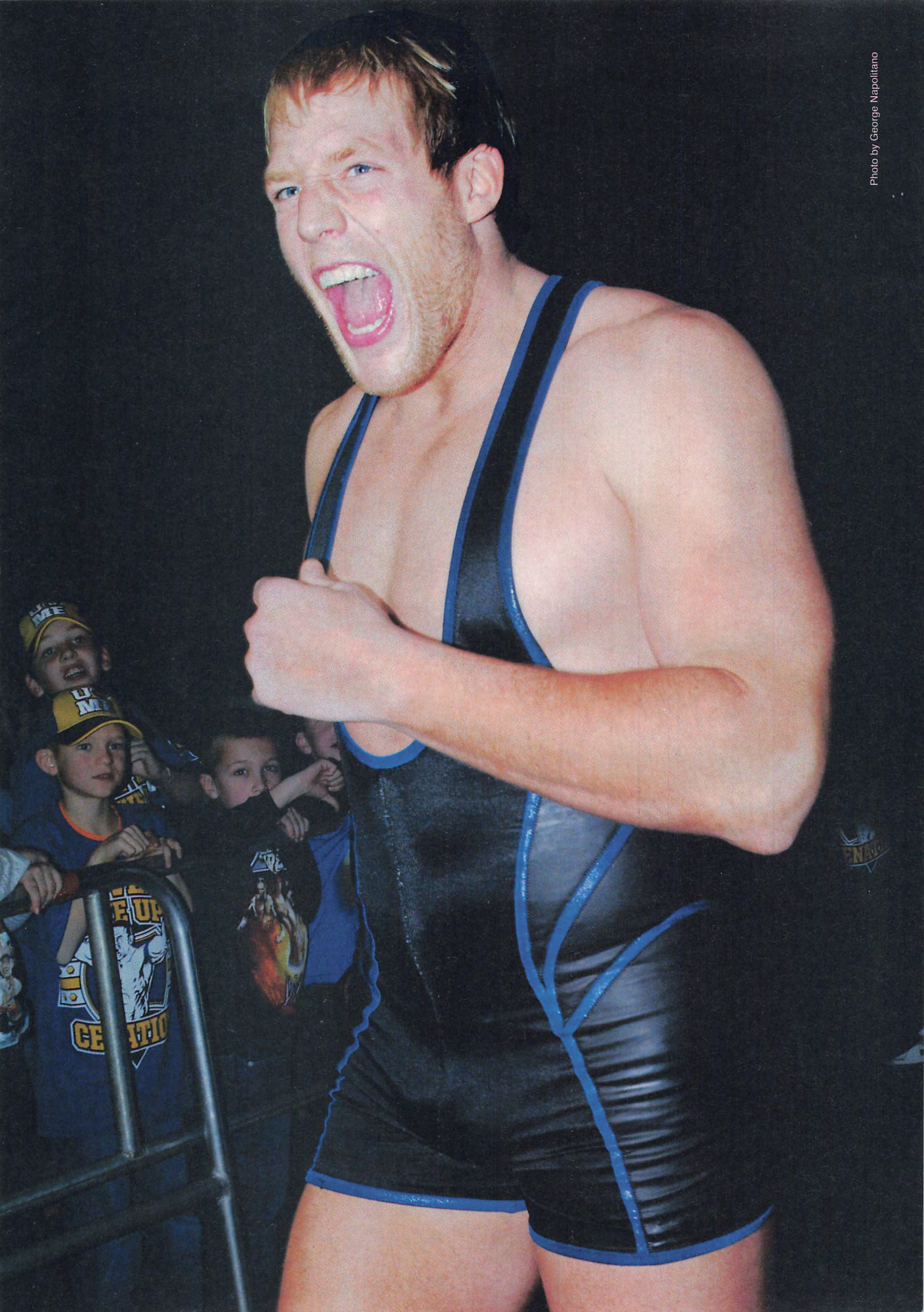
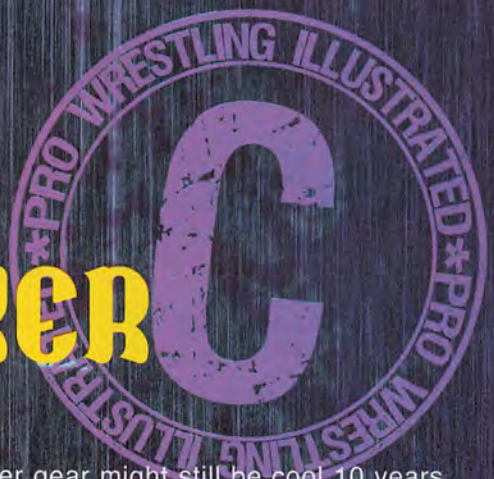


Photo by George Napolitano

THE UNDERTAKER



GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: When you've been around as long as The Undertaker, accomplished as much as The Undertaker, and vanquished as many opponents as The Undertaker, sometimes you have to let the challenges come to you. 'Taker waited for Shawn Michaels to cost him the World title in February before he agreed to defend his WrestleMania streak against him for the second straight year. Then he sent HBK into retirement. Waited for Kane to reignite their feud, too. That didn't work out all that well for UT. Injuries took their toll, too. The 'Mania win counts for a lot in his world, but there wasn't much else that he accomplished, whether he had specific goals or not.

GRADE: C

MARKETABILITY: Other than maybe the stir he caused by badmouthing Brock Lesnar at a UFC event (causing many to wonder if maybe they would meet at WrestleMania 27), the "Dead Man" didn't become a whole lot more marketable in 2010 than he had been before, but that's okay. Undertaker T-shirts and other gear might still be cool 10 years after he shuts his casket for good. We would imagine that just knowing 'Taker is slated to be on the card is enough for some people to buy tickets to a WWE event these days.

GRADE: A

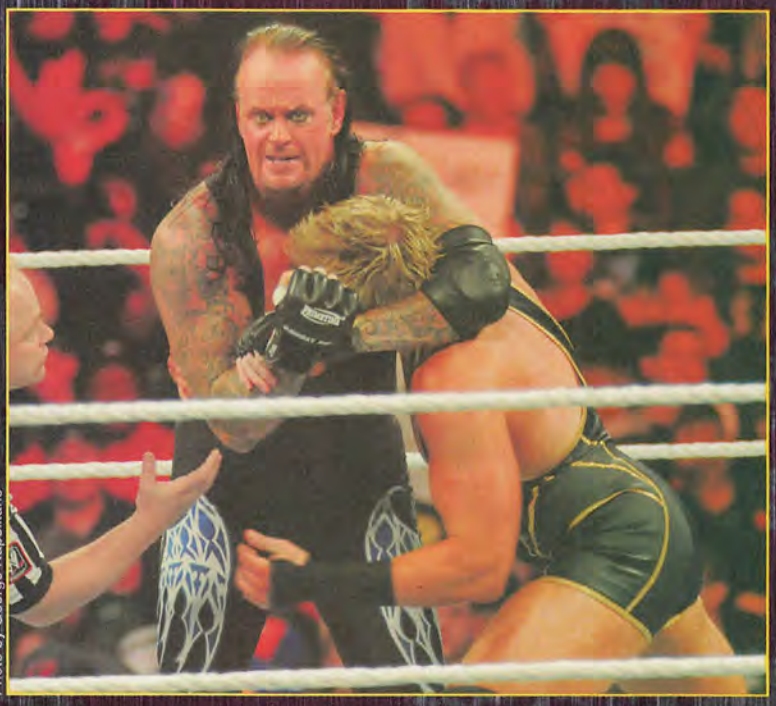


Photo by George Napolitano

REPERTOIRE: Much has been made in recent years of UT's decision to incorporate his love for mixed martial arts into his wrestling repertoire. The "Hell's Gate" gogoplata has been a wonderful complement to his more traditional wrestling finisher, the Tombstone piledriver. Not many others of his status and experience are willing to freshen things up so vastly so late in their career. Frankly, UT wasn't around consistently enough to upgrade the repertoire much further in this past year. Not that he needed to, of course.

GRADE: B

CAREER GROWTH: Undertaker's career might not be capable of any significant growth after two full decades in WWE. He doesn't need any more titles. Fans wouldn't even think of allowing him to turn heel, no matter what he did or said. Heck, if he changed much, people would say he isn't The Undertaker anymore.

GRADE: C

OVERALL VALUE: If you were to assess his value to WWE in general or over the length of his career, you could put it right up there with that of Bruno Sammartino, Hulk Hogan, Steve Austin, and The Rock. But this is 2011, and WWE is clearly preparing for life after The Undertaker while still trying to wring as much out of his injury-ravaged body as it can. He'd still be valuable if he only competed at WrestleMania, but we do have to consider the entire year, and he again missed a lot of time. The bright side is that every time he returns, it's a must-see event.

GRADE: C

Photo by George Napolitano

EVE TORRES

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Eve went from being R-Truth's backup dancer to capturing the Divas championship at The Royal Rumble. That win helped prove that her first Divas title reign wasn't a fluke. Torres has looked impressive at times, but she lacks singles wins over elite competition. She wasn't even a scheduled participant in the Rumble bout where she won the championship; she was announced at the last moment by the Raw GM. Had Natalya and Lay-Cool had an opportunity to prepare for Eve's involvement in the bout, odds are she wouldn't have walked out of that ring with the butterfly belt.

GRADE: B

MARKETABILITY: Eve is a beautiful woman, but beautiful women are a dime a dozen in WWE. Other than her dancing, she hasn't exhibited much personality, despite being in WWE for three years now. When she was announced as the fourth participant in the Divas match at The Royal Rumble, there was almost zero crowd reaction. She hasn't captured the fans' attention at all.

GRADE: C-

REPERTOIRE: As a wrestler, Eve makes a great dancer. No one can deny that Eve is in terrific condition and athletic. She has even studied Brazilian jiu-jitsu and kickboxing. Her wrestling skills leave a lot to be desired, though. Her handspring elbow is flashy, but it does little damage. Her standing moonsault is effective, but it is easily countered. She is a mediocre counter-wrestler with a virtually non-existent ground game. In a singles match, wrestlers like Natalya, Gail Kim, and Michelle McCool would eat her alive.

GRADE: D

CAREER GROWTH: The former Diva Search contestant has earned a place in WWE. She is enthusiastic and dedicated, and she has brought passion and excitement to everything she has done, from managing to dancing to wrestling. She'll never be confused with Sherri Martel or Trish Stratus, but she seems committed to improving and surviving in WWE. She had shown a willingness to learn and she doesn't back down from a challenge, which is the best way for her to improve in the ring. She may be a two-time champion, but she has a long way to go to prove that she is truly championship material.

GRADE: C

OVERALL VALUE: Eve has her flaws as a wrestler, but she has shown she's willing to get her hands dirty and to work hard to improve her game. If she continues on her current path, there's every reason to believe that her best years are still ahead of her. The most impressive thing that Eve has is an eagerness to throw herself fully into any opportunity she receives. Whether she is being called upon to serve as a dancer, a valet, a wrestler, or a model, Eve puts her best foot forward. She has a good attitude, and that's a critical component for long-term success in wrestling. As an in-ring talent, she is very replaceable. But her attitude and willingness to adapt make her a valuable asset to WWE.

GRADE: C

Photo by George Napolitano

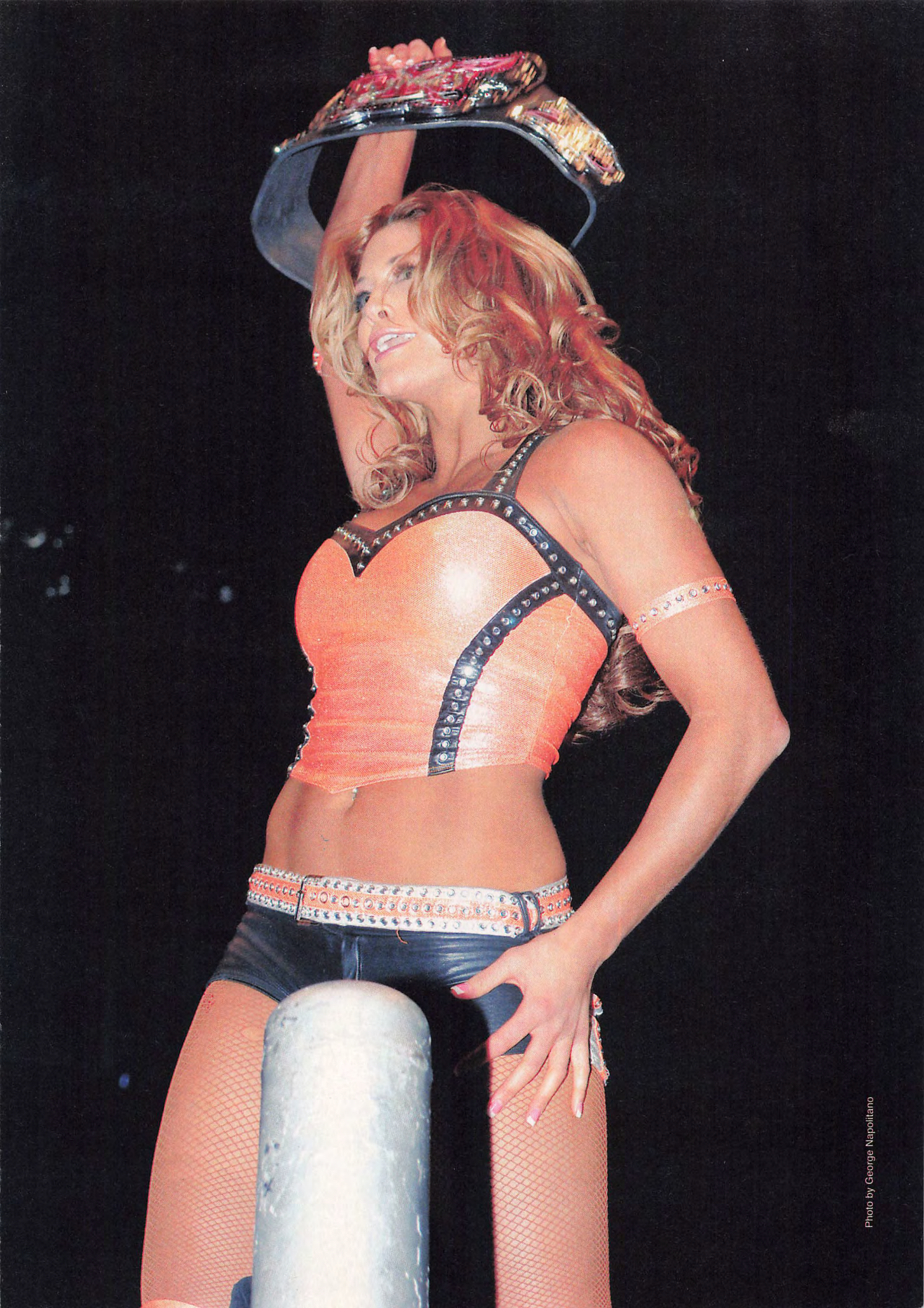
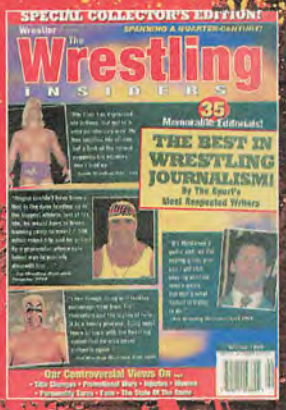


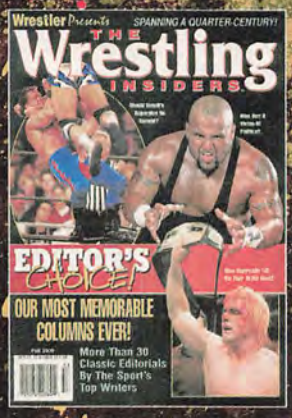
Photo by George Napolitano

WRESTLING COLLECTORS!

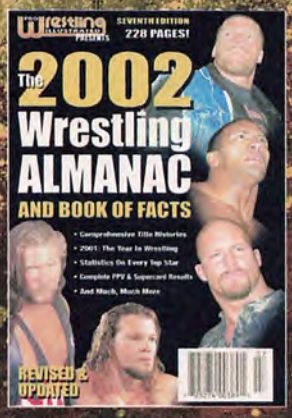
Supplies are limited, order now before they're all gone!



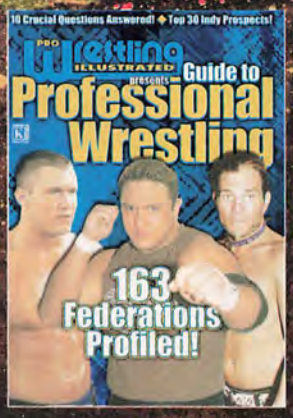
WRESTLING INSIDERS (Winter '99)
Go back through the years with wrestling's most respected columnists, including Dan Shocket, Eddie Elner, and Stu Saks.



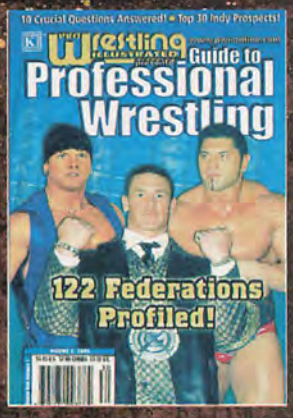
WRESTLING INSIDERS (Fall 2000)
Titles, holds and maneuvers, supercards, tag teams, hall of famers, the state of the game. You want our opinion? Buy the magazine!



2002 WRESTLING ALMANAC
The seventh annual edition updates our historical records and takes a look back at the year 2001.

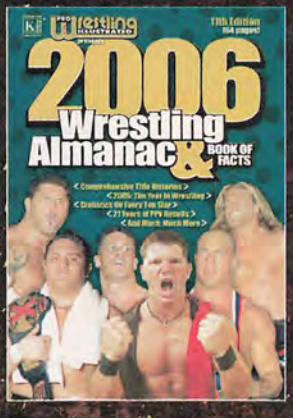

10 Crucial Questions Answered! • Top 30 Indy Prospects!
Pro Wrestling ILLUSTRATED presents
Guide to Professional Wrestling
163 Federations Profiled!

PWI GUIDE TO PRO WRESTLING (2004)
More than 160 pro wrestling federations profiled, 10 crucial questions for 2005, top 30 prospects. Digest format.


10 Crucial Questions Answered! • Top 30 Indy Prospects!
Pro Wrestling ILLUSTRATED presents
Guide to Professional Wrestling
122 Federations Profiled!

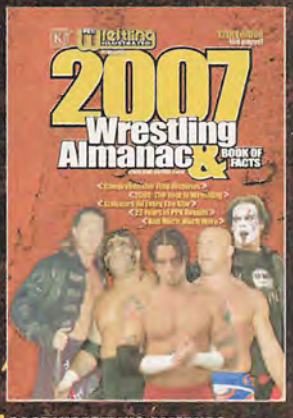
PWI GUIDE TO PRO WRESTLING (2005)
More than 122 pro wrestling federations profiled, 10 crucial questions for 2006, top 30 prospects, all-time "Indy 30." Digest format.

PWI WRESTLING YEARBOOK (Fall 2005)
Insider scouting reports on 50 stars, color pinups galore. 164 pages.



2006 WRESTLING ALMANAC
Pay-per-view and title lineage updates, a look back at the top stories of 2005, plus much more.

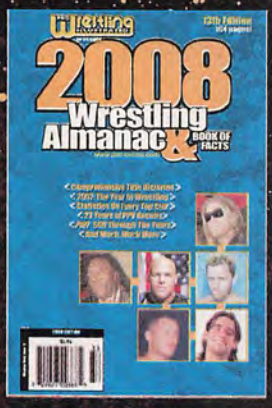
REPORT CARDS OF THE STARS (October 2006)
Grading the top 50 stars in the sport today. 164 pages.



2007 WRESTLING ALMANAC
2006 in review, plus pay-per-view rundown, title histories, and much more.

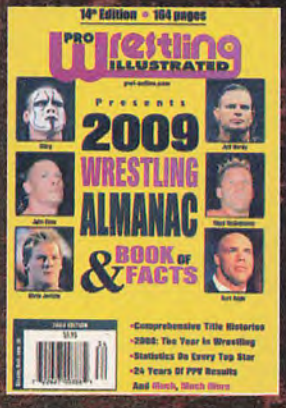
REPORT CARDS OF THE STARS
(October 2007)
Back with our grades for the sport's top 50 stars. 164 pages.

REPORT CARDS OF THE STARS
(July 2008)
It's nervous time for 50 top wrestlers! 164 pages.

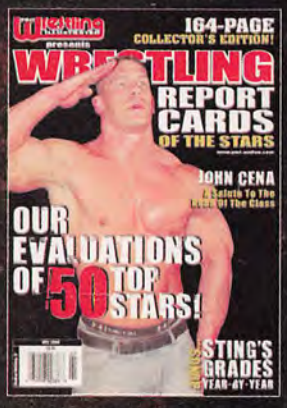


2008 WRESTLING ALMANAC
A review of the biggest stories of 2007, plus title chronology and PPV result updates, and more.

PWI 500 (October 2008)
The list changes every year, but the reaction from the wrestling community does not. A ranking of the 500 wrestlers is a lightning rod for controversy. 164 pages.



2009 WRESTLING ALMANAC
2008 in review, comprehensive title histories, PPV history, and more.



REPORT CARDS OF THE STARS
(July 2009)
We might ask the wrestlers to get them signed by their parents! 164 pages.

2009 PWI 500 (October 2009)
It had been nine years since Triple-H last topped the list, and many criticized our choice. But based on his in-ring success, nobody was more deserving of the honor. 164 pages.

2010 WRESTLING ALMANAC
2009 in review, plus pay-per-view listing, guide to indies, title histories, and much more.

COLLECTOR'S ISSUES

- ☐ 1999 Wrestling Insiders (Winter '99)
- ☐ Wrestling Insiders (Fall 2000)
- ☐ 2002 Wrestling Almanac
- ☐ PWI Guide To Pro Wrestling (2004)
- ☐ PWI Guide To Pro Wrestling (Vol. 2, 2005)
- ☐ PWI Wrestling Yearbook (Fall 2005)
- ☐ 2006 Wrestling Almanac
- ☐ Report Cards Of The Stars (October 2006)
- ☐ 2007 Wrestling Almanac
- ☐ Report Cards Of The Stars (October 2007)
- ☐ Report Cards Of The Stars (July 2008)
- ☐ 2008 Wrestling Almanac
- ☐ 2008 PWI 500 (October2008)
- ☐ 2009 Wrestling Almanac
- ☐ Report Cards Of The Stars (July 2009)
- ☐ 2009 PWI 500 (October 2009)
- ☐ 2010 Wrestling Almanac

Please send the collector's issues I have indicated below! I have enclosed $7 per issue (plus $2 each for postage and handling per issue) as payment in full or provided my credit card number to charge my purchase.

Send to: Kappa Publishing Group Inc.
P.O. Box 96, Ft. Washington, PA 19034

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ **State** _____ **Zip** _____

Please indicate method of payment:

☐ Check or money order
(enclosed and payable to Kappa Publishing Group Inc.)

☐ Visa # _____

☐ MasterCard # _____

Expiration Date: ____/____ (MO / YR)

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
3 DIGIT SECURITY CODE

Signature: _____

For Canadian and Mexican orders, the postage and handling charge is $3 per issue (airmail). For all other countries, the postage and handling charge is $7.50 per issue (airmail). Int'l money order in U.S. funds only. Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery.

7606/2 10

JAY LETHAL

PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED C-

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: The highlight of Jay Lethal's year was his victory over Ric Flair at Victory Road. He won a pair of X division championships, but both reigns proved to be brief and uneventful. Now that Kazarian has the X division title, Lethal has fallen off the radar. This isn't the first time this has happened. In 2007, Lethal scored a clean win over Kurt Angle. That victory could have propelled him into the main-event picture, but it never happened. Lethal slipped back into the undercard, just as he did following his big win over Flair. Lethal proved he is capable of pulling off the occasional big victory, but one-off wins are quickly forgotten. He needs to do a better job building off those wins.

GRADE: C

MARKETABILITY: Lethal is an underrated wrestler, but he's more known for his imitations of others than for his own abilities. His "Black Machismo" persona was fun for a few weeks, but Lethal ran it into the ground by carrying on his "Macho Man" impression for more than two years. He has allowed himself to become a novelty act, and that overshadows his true abilities. Lethal needs to establish himself as *himself*, not a knockoff of someone like Flair or Randy Savage. Until he does that, his marketability is nominal.

GRADE: D

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

REPERTOIRE: Lethal is a relatively small competitor, but he has developed an assortment of innovative moves to compensate for his lack of power. His Lethal Combination backbreaker/STO can take out any opponent because of the way it jars the head and neck, and knocks the wind out of an opponent's lungs. One good thing about his propensity for imitation is that it has helped him add proven finishers like the figure-four leglock and the flying elbowdrop to his arsenal, making him a well-rounded competitor. Lethal's biggest flaw is his tendency to telegraph moves, giving opponents an opportunity to counter a figure-four or elude the elbowdrop. He needs to spend less time playing to the crowd and take less time between offensive attacks.

GRADE: B

CAREER GROWTH: Lethal may be a six former-time X division champion, but he is growing stagnant. He has already proven himself in the X division; it's about time that he gets out of his comfort zone and aims for loftier goals. Lethal was associated with the Front Line during its battle with the Main Event Mafia. Maybe it's time for Lethal to consider joining forces with Fortune or Immortal. He needs to do something to get off of the treadmill and to remind the world that he's a championship-level wrestler and not simply an X division placeholder.

GRADE: C-

OVERALL VALUE: Lethal is a loyal TNA wrestler and a cornerstone of the X division, but he has the potential to be much more. He may never win the World title, but he has the talent to contend for it. Imitating Flair isn't the way to improve his lot. He needs to take some risks and make some challenges. Right now, Lethal is expendable, and that's a shame.

GRADE: C-

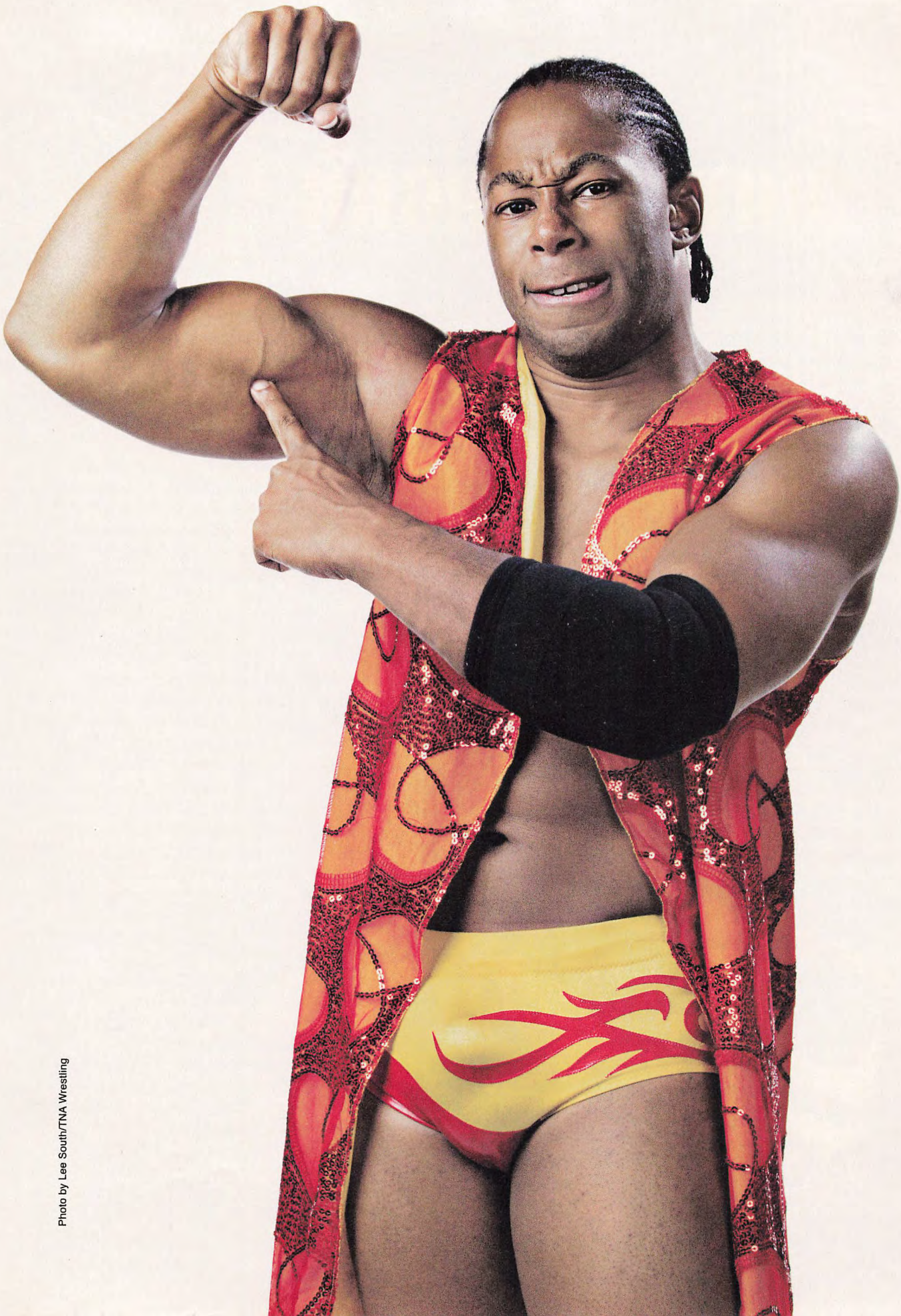
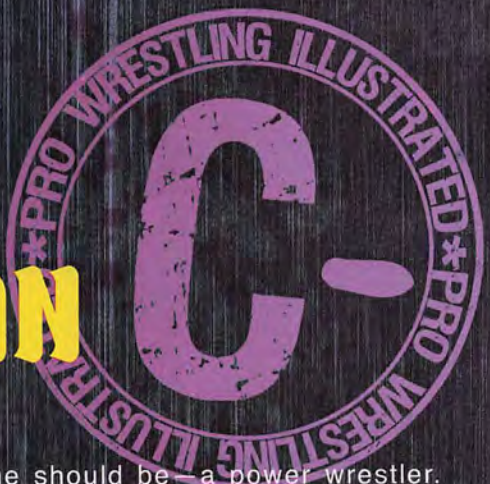


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

MATT MORGAN



GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: The seven-footer asserted himself and became a PPV main-eventer in 2010, but Morgan failed to get the job done against Jeff Hardy. Now karma is coming back to bite him. Morgan viciously turned on his tag team partner, Hernandez, and now that "Super-Mex" is back on the scene, it looks like a feud between the former tag team champions is inevitable. That's bad news for Morgan, as a feud with Hernandez is a giant stride in the wrong direction at this stage of his career.

GRADE: C+

MARKETABILITY: A mobile and athletic seven-footer should be a marketable attraction, but Morgan hasn't taken off the way he should, and there are a few major reasons why. He comes across as uncomfortable on the microphone and has been unable to convey the intensity and fury a man his size should. He's big, but he carries himself as a smaller man. He could also use a new nickname: there's absolutely nothing sexy about a "Blueprint."

GRADE: D

REPERTOIRE: Morgan is a genetic wonder: a seven-footer with an incredibly muscular physique and freakish agility. But he seems determined to avoid being what he should be—a power wrestler. Instead of manhandling opponents, Morgan tries to finesse them. There is no reason in the world why Morgan should allow himself to wrestle Jeff Hardy's style of match. A monster truck shouldn't try to outrace a Ferrari. He should assert himself and control the pace and flow of a bout. He also frequently turns his back on opponents, which is never a good strategy. One of his favorite moves is to throw back elbows at an opponent in the corner. Relatively speaking, the elbows inflict little damage (sometimes sailing right over a slumping opponent's head) and they put Morgan in a precarious position. He badly needs a manager to point out these glaring flaws in order to improve.

GRADE: C-

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

CAREER GROWTH: Morgan caught fire at the tail end of 2010 and earned some title shots against Hardy, but he failed to take advantage of the opportunity. With the arrival of Sting into the already-crowded title picture, Morgan has disappeared from title contention, despite coming within a hair's breadth of the championship just a few months ago. Morgan took two big steps forward, but then he took three steps backward. A feud against Hernandez— or worse, a *loss* to Hernandez—at this time could do major damage to his TNA World title aspirations.

GRADE: C-

OVERALL VALUE: Morgan was poised to become one of TNA's young lions. He had the size, the strength, and the opportunity, but he didn't come through. Even though he lost in controversial matches, there's not much of an outcry from the fans for Morgan to get another title shot. The fans have moved on, and Morgan is getting left behind. He certainly has the talent to become World champion, but he needs polishing. Without the right counsel, Morgan is in danger of becoming another also-ran like Monty Brown, Tomko, and Lance Hoyt.

GRADE: C-

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

SAMOA JOE

PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED • PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED

C-

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: There was a time, not terribly long ago, when Joe's existence in TNA was defined by his insatiable desire to win gold. Somehow, the "Samoan Submission Machine" has gotten lost in the shuffle. He last held a singles title—the X division championship—in mid-2009. His motives since then have been all over the map, as he's entered into and out of various alliances and gotten caught up in one irrelevant feud after another. After hitting a low point in losing a submission match to Jeff Jarrett at Final Resolution, Joe's confidence seemed to pick up. He signed a contract extension with TNA in December, then went on to get the better of D'Angelo Dinero in a brief but violent feud.

GRADE: D

MARKETABILITY: Joe is real—perhaps *too* real to be marketed and showcased seriously in the eyes of TNA management. Far from a chiseled specimen, Joe carries plenty of extra weight and has simply failed to streamline his appearance. WWE, which had shown plenty of interest in Joe in the past, reportedly backed off due to concerns about his look. In the ring, Joe is all business. He comes off as a cold, calculated killer, and that is the reputation he has lived off of to this point.

GRADE: C

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

REPERTOIRE: When he's at the top of his game, there isn't a wrestler in the world more dangerous than Joe. With his mean streak, brute strength, and extensive knowledge of grappling styles and submission holds, he is capable of not only winning titles, but of putting anyone on the shelf for a long period of time. The problem is, Joe hasn't been on his game in some time. Whether it's been due to a lack of focus or even contract negotiation distractions, the moves remain the same, but the fervor behind them is not at the level Joe has exhibited in the past in TNA, or while dominating Ring of Honor before that.

GRADE: B-

CAREER GROWTH: Joe has been going nowhere of late. While his recent victories over Dinero have sparked hope that he is getting back on track, he has yet to climb back into title contention. What's most distressing is that he doesn't even *talk* about wanting to regain the TNA World title anymore. Is it a lack of confidence that is holding Joe back? What has happened to a man once obsessed with being a world champion, now seemingly satisfied with his position in the mid-card?

GRADE: D

OVERALL VALUE: If anyone has taken a step back since the Hulk Hogan/Eric Bischoff regime in TNA began, it's Joe. While his fans continue to wait for him to simply buzzsaw his way through the roster and return to main-event status, the 32-year-old seems conflicted. It's almost as if he feels that others are more worthy of dictating his career path; how else do you explain his decision to join forces then break off ties with various factions so routinely? Joe has always been at his best when he's on his own. He'd do well to continue down that road and put the recent past behind him.

GRADE: C-

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

MISSING ANY PWI DOUBLES?

Limited quantities of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated's* popular 148-page double issues are available by mail order. Act now before they're gone!

March 2005: 2004—The Year In Wrestling. Plus: 2004 In Review, Achievement '05 awards, Unofficial/Official, phantastic photos of 2004, predictions for 2005.

July 2005: Gold Strike! Cena & Batista Change The Face Of Wrestling! Plus: Kevin Nash, Chris Benoit, Heartbreakers, all-time WrestleMania roster, the state of the game.

November 2005: The *PWI* 500. Plus: Batista, RVD, Samoa Joe, Chris Jericho, Muhammad Hassan, dream teams.

March 2006: 2005—The Year In Wrestling. Plus: 2005 In Review, Achievement 2005 awards, Unofficial/Official awards, phantastic photos of 2005, predictions for 2006.

May 2006: Awesome! Samoa Joe Takes Wrestling Where It's Never Been Before! Plus: Lashley, Angle-Batista, Edge, ROH-CZW, Wrestling Forecaster.

July 2006: WM 22: Magic Mania Moments! Plus: The State of the Game, Abyss & Mitchell, Davey Richards, Christian Cage.

September 2006: The Triple-H Paradox: What He Needs He Cannot Keep. Plus: Mid-year report, Shawn Michaels, Rob Van Dam, Chris Daniels, SummerSlam's top 25 matches, ECW years—1992-2001.

January 2007: Sudden Impact! Can Kurt Angle Do For TNA What Hulk Hogan Did For WCW? Plus: Raw vs. Smackdown vs. TNA vs. ECW, The Big Show, Orton-Masters-Carlito-Nitro, Matches of the Year.

March 2007: 2006—The Year In Wrestling. Plus: 2006 In Review, Achievement 2006 awards, Unofficial/Official awards, phantastic photos of 2006, predictions for 2007.

May 2007: The 2007 *PWI* Poll. Plus: Batista, AMW, C.M. Punk, Bam Bam Bigelow, Flair-Dykstra, Chris Sabin.

July 2007: 'Mania Madness: Exclusive WM 23 Coverage. Plus: The State of the Game, Samoa Joe, wrestling deaths, global wrestling.

September 2007: Orton Pays The Price In The Ring ... And Earns The Fans' Respect. Plus: Mid-year report, Edge, MVP, Jay Lethal, Great Khali.

November 2007: *The PWI 500.* Plus: John Cena, TNA, WWE draft, TNA analysis.

December 2007: Triple-H Disses The Champ: "Cena's Disrespect Is A Sign Of Fear." Plus: Kurt & Karen Angle, McMahons-Hornswoggle, Batista-Khali, Raw vs. Smackdown vs. TNA vs. ECW, 90 minutes with Chris Jericho.

February 2008: HBK: "If You Ask Me, I'm Younger Than Randy Orton." Plus: Kurt Angle, Nigel McGuiness, Gail Kim, Royal Rumble at 20, sleaziest sluts & slimeballs.

March 2008: 2007—The Year In Wrestling. Plus: 2007 In Review, Achievement 2007 awards, Unofficial/Official awards, phantastic photos of 2007, predictions for 2008.

June 2008: Special Tribute To Ric Flair: His 25 Greatest Covers Of All-Time. Plus: Y2J-JBL, Christian Cage, NWA, Brock Lesnar, Vickie Guerrero, John Morrison.

August 2008: Was Shawn Wrong? Former World Champions Speak Loudly ... And Unanimously! Plus: Angle-Joe, Undertaker, C.M. Punk, Austin Aries, State of the Game.

September 2008: Take It Like A Man, Orton! A Real Champion Knows How To Lose. Plus: Lance Cade, McChif, GMs, guide to independents, Mid-Year Report.

December 2008: Five-Way Faceoff: Raw vs. Smackdown vs. ECW vs. ROH. Plus: Michelle McCool, JBL, Jake Hager, Shawn Michaels, Angle-Styles, Ric Flair.

February 2009: Annoying? Si ... Successful? Si ... But Is Santino A Worthy Champ? Plus: Sheik Abdul Bashir, TNA Wars, Hardys, Super 8, Bryan Danielson, second-generations stars vs. dads, 20 matches that changed wrestling.

March 2009: 2008—The Year In Wrestling. Plus: 2008 In Review, Achievement 2008 awards, Unofficial/Official awards, phantastic photos of 2008, predictions for 2009.

June 2009: The *PWI* Poll. Plus: Hardy vs. Hardy, Christian, Team 3-D, Kelly Kelly, CZW, Shawn Michaels, greatest wrestlers never to win world title.

August 2009: Jacked Up! Old Pro, New Era For TNA. Plus: Batista, FCW prospects, MVP, Homicide, State of the Game.

September 2009: Mid-Year Report. Plus: Angelina Love, MVP, Evan Bourne, *PWI*'s 30th anniversary.

November 2009: C.M. Skunk: The Stench Of Tainted Success. Plus: Mickie James, Tommy Dreamer, Kurt Angle, Francine, Chris Jericho, DiBiase Sr. & Jr., "*PWI* Female 50."

December 2009: Five-Way Faceoff: Raw vs. Smackdown vs. ECW vs. ROH. Plus: ODB-Cody, Orton-Cena, American Wolves, Dolph Ziggler, anti-Americanism, Gabe Sapolsky.

February 2010: Triple-H—Wrestler Of The Decade. Plus: The Decade In Review, Desmond Wolfe, Super 8, John Cena, Hulk Hogan, Capt. Lou by Paul Heyman.

March 2010: 2009—The Year In Wrestling. Plus: 2009 In Review, Achievement 2009 awards, Unofficial/Official awards, phantastic photos of 2009.

June 2010: Can Anyone Stand Up To Sheamus? Plus: The Miz, Cary Silkin, Jack Brisco, Steve Williams, WrestleMania 100, *PWI* Poll.

Please send me the **PWI DOUBLES** I have checked below. I have enclosed a check or money order for $8.95 (plus $2 for shipping and handling for each), payable to Kappa Publishing Group Inc., for each issue I am ordering.

- ☐ March 2005
- ☐ July 2005
- ☐ November 2005
- ☐ January 2006
- ☐ March 2006
- ☐ May 2006
- ☐ July 2006
- ☐ September 2006
- ☐ January 2007
- ☐ March 2007
- ☐ May 2007
- ☐ July 2007
- ☐ September 2007
- ☐ November 2007
- ☐ December 2007
- ☐ February 2008
- ☐ March 2008
- ☐ June 2008
- ☐ August 2008
- ☐ September 2008
- ☐ November 2008
- ☐ December 2008
- ☐ January 2009
- ☐ February 2009
- ☐ March 2009
- ☐ June 2009
- ☐ August 2009
- ☐ September 2009
- ☐ November 2009
- ☐ December 2009
- ☐ February 2010
- ☐ March 2010
- ☐ June 2010

SEND TO: Kappa Publishing Group Inc.
Box 96, Ft. Washington, PA 19034

Please indicate method of payment:

☐ Check or money order
(enclosed and payable to Kappa Publishing Group Inc.)

☐ VISA ☐ MasterCard

Card #__ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __

Expiration Date: __/__ (MO/YR) 3 Digit Security Code: __ __ __

Signature: _____

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

APT. ____ CITY _____

STATE ____ ZIP _____ EMAIL _____

For Canadian and Mexican orders, the postage and handling charge is $3 per issue (airmail). For all other countries, the postage and handling charge is $7.50 per issue (airmail). Int'l money order in U.S. funds only. Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery.

7709/03-10

SAVE

HALF OFF THE NEWSSTAND PRICE!

INCLUDES PWI ALMANAC & BOOK OF FACTS

For better than a quarter-century, subscribers to Pro Wrestling Illustrated have enjoyed the convenience of having each magazine delivered right to their door. Plus, they save money. Lots of it, $54.20 to be exact!

CHECK THIS OUT!

Annually, PWI publishes seven double issues and four 164-page monster specials. You will receive all these issues, plus our annual PWI Almanac And Book Of Facts with a 12-issue subscription.

SO HERE IT IS...

RECEIVE ALL 12 ISSUES &
SAVE 50% OFF NEWSSTAND PRICE!

Clip coupon and send to: **Kappa Publishing Group Inc., PO Box 433133, Palm Coast, FL 32143-3133**

○ I'M IN. Give me the convenience and savings of being a PWI subscriber. I have indicated below which subscription plan I am ordering and have enclosed my payment or provided my credit card information.

DECIDE FOR YOURSELF! (check one)

Save $54.20 Off The Newsstand Price!
☐ 12 issues in all: 7 of PWI Double, 4 PWI Specials, 2010 PWI Almanac for $54.20. PWI

Save Nearly $16 Off The Newsstand Price!
☐ PWI Double/PWI Specials (6 issues) for only $36.99! PWI

Please indicate method of payment:

Check or money order (enclosed and payable to Kappa Publishing Group Inc.)

○ VISA # _____

○ MasterCard # _____

○ Expiration Date: ___/___ MO / YR

Signature: _____ APT. _____

NAME _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ ☐New Subscription ☐Renewal

For Canada and Mexico: $53.49 for 6 issues; $87.20 for 12 issues. All other countries: $81.99 for 6 issues; $144.20 for 12 issues. International money orders only in U.S. funds only. Airmail shipping only outside the U.S. Please allow up to eight weeks before you receive your first magazine. Offer expires December 31, 2011.

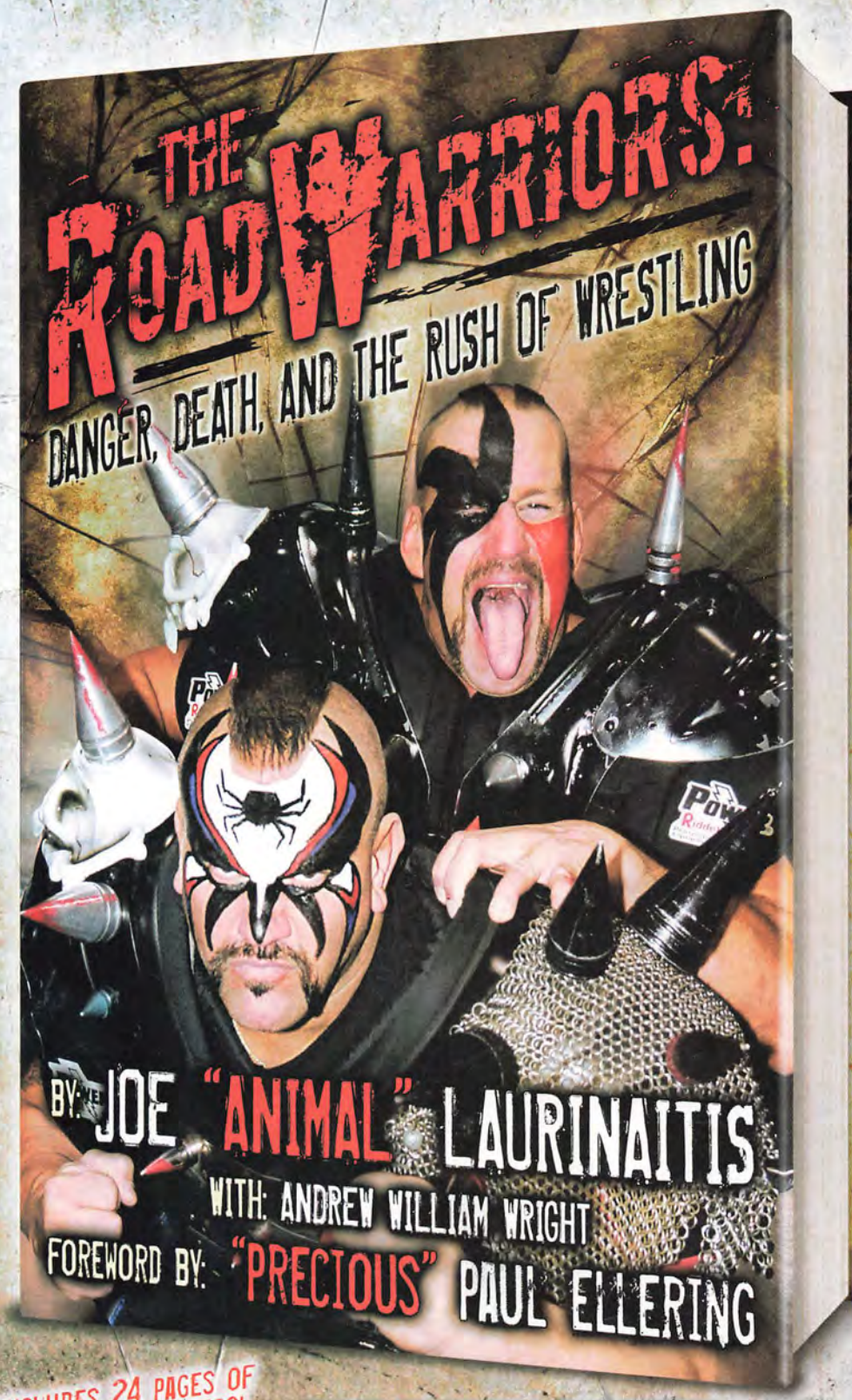
A1310T

7817/03.10

THE WORLD'S GREATEST TAG TEAM!

THEY SNACKED ON DANGER AND DINED ON DEATH!

"I think the Road Warriors, or LOD, was one of the greatest wrestling tag teams of all time. . . . All I can do is shake my head and smile at the memory of a spiked-up Joe saying, 'Tell 'em, Hawk!' and Mike with that crazy mad look on his face, his tongue hanging out, barking out, '**Oh . . . what a rush!**' Both Joe and Mike were first-rate pros who were loved and respected by all who knew them."
—BRET "THE HITMAN" HART


THE ROAD WARRIORS:
DANGER, DEATH, AND THE RUSH OF WRESTLING
BY: JOE "ANIMAL" LAURINAITIS
WITH: ANDREW WILLIAM WRIGHT
FOREWORD BY: "PRECIOUS" PAUL ELLERING

Check out Animal in episode 10 of Medallion Mondays!!

One of the 1st 20 webisodes picked for the 2011 LA Webfest!

To view the webisode, scan the 2D barcode with your smartphone or visit youtube.com/medallionmovies.

MEDALLION PRESS
medallionpress.com

INCLUDES 24 PAGES OF FULL COLOR PHOTOS!

THEROADWARRIORANIMAL.COM